

SPY

HOLIDAY ISSUE

Di, Ellen!

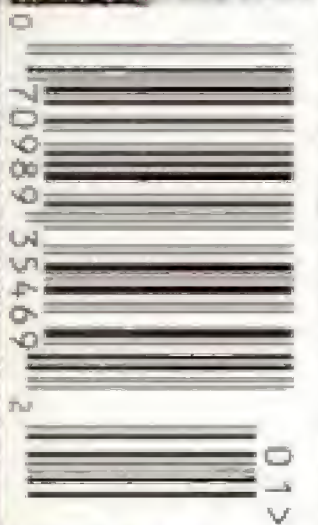
...and the Rest
of the Year's

100

Worst People,
Places, and Things!

1997 COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE

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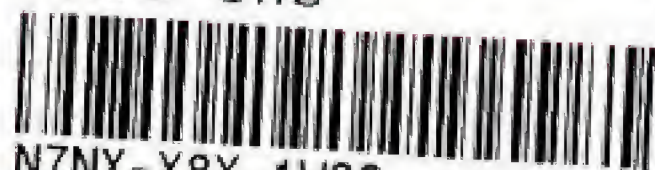
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THE MEEK SHALL INFEST THE EARTH

TOP: A patented blend of heirs and spices

MIDDLE: Marv Albert sinks a mugshot

BOTTOM: Why grandmother, what a low-quality fake ransom note you write!

Get Your Skates On

Features

THE SPY 100: OLYMPIC EDITION

34

For the tenth year, or maybe the eleventh, SPY hazards its annual list of the hundred most irritating people and events. With little time to do it ourselves, in between the bloody marys and the steaming platters of Eggs Copenhagen, we handed the project over to a crack team of Austrian figure skating judges. They may be assumed to be reliable in judging things, except when it comes to Tibet's Heinrich Harrer. As an added bonus, therefore, this issue of SPY can also be used as an extremely reliable though technically unofficial guide to TV figure skating in the Winter Olympics. You think we're joking. We're not. Use it to understand obscure but crucial phrases, like "triple lutz," "Wanda Beazle," "the Katarina Rule," and the "Death Spiral," which are helpfully defined, and then brought to bear in the high-pressure ice routines of the space station Mir and the Oakland School Board.

DORKS IN PROGRESS

54

At one time, if you wrote "stripy predators of Hind" when you really should have written "tigers," someone would come up, call you a crappy poet, and hurt your feelings. Not any more. Today, you can use a rubber puppet in a ventriloquist act, and people will applaud you anyway, because they are up next. Vaguely touring the amateur reading scene in Manhattan, Tom Common discovers the state of amateur writing, the principle of Mutual Assured Affirmation, and—probably—the future of literature itself.

THE PLAIN, THE PLAIN

58

Basically we all know that rich guys can be four-foot-three with leprosy and no hair, and still swank on barmaids if they've got enough money. What's less explored is the half-lit, and potentially very lucrative stomping ground of the *semi-ugly*. You know, bald TV stars whom women crave, like Patrick Stewart and that plump man from *NYPD Blue*; supermodels with knobby faces; ordinary looking women like Annie Lennox who through force of personality get hailed as The Most Beautiful Woman in the World. It's what the French, in their we've-got-a-household-word-for-anything-non-electric way, refer to as being *jolie-laide*, or "beautiful-ugly." As this exclusive SPY guide makes clear, however, some of the *jolie-laide* can in fact be mighty *laide* indeed.

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VICTIMLESS CRIMES THAT HURT US ALL

28

One thing worse than movie plots that don't, when you really stop and think about it, hang together in terms of *plot*, is the sort of person who actually does stop and think about it, especially if they then go on to talk about it a lot. Toby Young laboriously cranes his neck round and tells them "Shhhh!"

DEAD MEN WHO COULD SAVE THE WORLD

30

Er...Mother Teresa was a man. By Will Self.

Cover Photo Credits: Sygma (Diana's body); Gary Czvekus/ Retna (Ellens face)

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Abra Moore

(Singer, Songwriter, Veteran of Van living.)

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(Bought EVERYONE
in the band ONE OF
these. Things get
PRETTY RANK AFTER
2 DAYS IN A VAN.)

IN Waikiki.
A shot FROM MY
Poi Dog days.

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MISS him
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ON THE
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BEASTLY DEVELOPMENTS

TOP: Disney cur wastes public forum

MIDDLE: Cindy Crawford, playfully removing an ethical cat bra

BOTTOM: Ex-chimp of loon

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How and why the erstwhile Egyptian reduced his bedpost to sawdust.

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Celebrities run afoul of Biblical prophecies. Yea.

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Olfactory Workers

DANIEL RADOSH

Like most journalists of his generation, Daniel Radosh prefers to write articles that don't require him to leave his apartment or speak with other human beings. For "The Internet Prolongs Its Cybermitzvah," p. 24, Radosh circled a few items from publications he got in the mail, supplemented these with more items from the NEXIS database, then slapped on an introductory paragraph and collected his paycheck. Radosh has done this kind of lazy work for SPY since 1991, and for magazines such as *Playboy*, for whose contributor's page the pretentious photograph at the right was originally taken.

ALEXANDRA RINGE

In 1985 Alexandra Ringe attempted a waltz jump, the most basic of the figure skating moves, and ended up with a thigh-long bruise that bore a striking resemblance to New Jersey, her home state. Ringe had had hopes of representing the Turnpike's Exit 4 at whichever skating competition allows sixteen-year-old entrants whose preferred method of stopping is ramming into the side of the rink, but after her fall, she refused to put on the decidedly-not-skincolored "flesh" tights necessary to hide her contusion. Proud of her fashion sense but simultaneously depressed by the sacrifice it forced her to make, she moped her way through high school, turned bitter in college and then numb for several years at a perfectly good job. Things perked up for Ringe when she found the editors of SPY, people who actually wanted to hear about the single axel that never was, who truly cared about the orangey tights that were never worn. Only with their support has she been able to get her metaphorical butt off the ice. She is going into coaching.

BERNARD LIVINGSTON

Bernard Livingston has been lawyer, author, photographer, publicist, and filmmaker. One of his books, *Their Turf*, was a Doubleday best-seller, another book, *Zoo*, won a selection of the Natural Science Book Club. His film *The Thoroughbred* won two national awards and is now in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Satirical poetry is his present main occupation.

G. BEATO

This is the first time G. Beato has appeared in SPY, and also the first time his contributor's note is longer than his contribution, a trend he hopes to continue in the future. He has written for *Wired*, *Spin*, *Newsday*, and many other fine publications, and is a regular contributor to the online zine *Suck*. Despite the fact that he can't draw, he also does a cartoon called "Negative Creep" for *SF Weekly*.





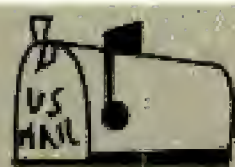
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FROM THE SPY MAILROOM

TO JUDGE FROM all the mail we've been receiving recently, we're guessing that one question is plaguing our loyal readership this holiday season: what do you get for the SPY mailboy who has everything? And it appears our readers have reached a consensus: the gift that keeps on giving is bag after bag of letters demanding the head of Toby Young ["Ban the Bong," October 1997], for whom the fires of hatred—much like the life-giving oil of Chanukah—burned, well, longer than anyone expected. And the lesson we can take away from it all is that pot-heads—normally a docile bunch—rant like men possessed when confronted with the specter of a Christmas spent without wacky tobacky.

TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, Robert Risse of Cathedral City, CA, who writes to inform us that "last time I read the Constitution my inalienable rights did not include being 'protected from myself'" and ends with the stern admonition that in publishing Mr. Young's article, "the service [SPY is] providing to the forces that continue to destroy our planet is not acceptable." Well, we appreciate the unsolicited opinion, Bob, but frankly our alien insect overlords assure us that we are indeed providing an "acceptable" service, thank you. You've uncovered our plot, but you're too late, Ape-Child. Your precious people and planet are doomed. Doomed.

FEDERAL INVESTIGATORS

Funny...after reading your past three issues I have found that your periodical most closely resembles *Playboy*, without the nudy [sic] pictures and interesting articles. Must one be part of the New York scene to fully comprehend just what the hell you guys are talking about?

Ben Goodwin
Minneapolis, MN

So you're telling me, if I'm reading the "Death-Heads" chart [November 1997] correctly, that if I get drunk, strangle a Canadian tourist, steal his wallet, chop off his head, have sex with the corpse, and then eat him, this is merely "unfortunate?"

Bill Thornton
Ft. Mitchell, KY

Well it's not *good* is it?

RUSTICS AND MOONCALVES

I can't tell you how excited I am to see *Rogue* coming out of "retirement." Although, I'm too young to have read *Rogue* during the 60s I discovered the magazine in my college's library during the early 80s (why a small, Midwestern Quaker college would have all 463 issues of *Rogue* both bound and on microfiche is beyond me). By the way, your November issue is my favorite since your "near death experience!"

Bill Ashto
Via the Internet

I recently received your October issue and wanted to express my thanks for a job well done. You are all quite righteous and intelligent; why don't you start your own newspaper? For example: *The New York Grimes* or even better the *Washington Fly* or the *New York Daily Toast*?

Amade Aliberti,
Boston, MA

Sadly, there is more to Satire than just dropping the word "toast" into someone's name, witness next month's exposé of real-estate mogul Donald Mayonnaise.

All Cut Up

In your article entitled "*Cosmopolitan's* Godmother of Hunk," [October 1997] there is a map of the U.S. On that map, an arrow points, vaguely, to somewhere in Montana—somewhere on the Crow Indian Reservation west of Hardin or Crow Agency, to the best of my calculations. Mark Unruh, from Lakeside, MT, lives in *northwestern* Montana. The arrow from the blurb on Unruh should point straight south, instead of southeast, and be only about 1/4 inch long. I realize I'm setting myself up for jeering on your part regarding the pedantics on my part. I don't care.

Kate Missett
Gillette, WY

Us neither.

Jonathan Barrett's article "The Godmother of Hunk" made it seem as if the only women who'd written me were fat and ugly. As a matter of fact, there were actually several beautiful women who wrote to me. I met some of them, and now we're friends.

Paul Noone
Somerset, NJ

If there's one piece of advice we can give you, Paul, it's to quit while you're ahead. We don't want to know any more about this, please, and neither do our readers.

FAT PORNOGRAPHERS WITH WATCHES ON EACH WRIST

I loved having my name as a cover line on your October 1997 issue. I loved seeing my name in a huge headline ["Remembering Al Goldstein"]. I loved the full-color photograph, as well. It's just a shame that there was no article to go along with them.

The so-called writer of the piece claims he worked for *Screw* and me 10 years ago. I don't remember him. He's probably right. Maybe I spoke to him two or three times, but he was not even important enough for me to fire him. I'm sure the messenger fired him.

Whatever his name is—let's call him Mark Kramer, for the sake of argument—he's truly a hemorrhoid in the asshole of journalism, a dickless wonder whose pathetic, delusional

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SOMEONE LIKE US

Another editor...of another magazine. Can you make out his features? Me neither. It doesn't matter. He's like us. He wants to achieve absolutely peak physical fitness, but he can't find the time to do it. He wants to take a closer look at the world around him, but not *too* much closer. Don't buy his magazine though! He's an idiot!

That's why I came up with **SPY** in the first place. So people like you and me—the so-called “new breed,” if you will—could exchange information on the topics that fascinate us, and perhaps share a few laughs along the way. It just one day hit me like a rock. In order for me to stay on top of every development in money management AND veal, pro-football AND teenage slang and wear, I'd have to go out to the newsstand and buy ten separate magazines. Why not have just one, I thought? And why not call it **SPY**? I picked up the phone, contacted the staff and got *them* pumped, and within ten minutes **SPY** was a going concern. I like to tell the readers who write to me, or who come up and introduce themselves at parties, that **SPY** stands for Stocks, Pecs and *most importantly* You. Or Yule, depending on the season.

And this time, it's Yule.

If you're like me—and you are (as I just explained) because that's why you're reading this magazine—you invariably find Christmas to be a time of celebration, of gift-receiving and dressing warm, of short nights and long family-oriented meals. Am I wrong? No. Not if I understand you like I patently do, given the fact of you holding the particular magazine that you are.

It is also a time of year traditionally associated in the public eye with taking a few days off work, of unwinding slightly. Does this mean that as a society we're getting lazier? That we may be lowering our guard against foreign invaders who may or may not be massed at our gates? Hmm? What is Work? Should we be doing more of it? Less? Or even the same amount we're doing now?

When I had my first job—editing the glossy national magazine *Vanity Fair* after school and on weekends—Work was a way of communicating with my friends and the adults who stood in my way about what the teenage me was all about: editing magazines, and being successful.

I look around me today at the youngsters I meet at parties and who come to my house afterwards and I'm not sure I see the same drive. Does this mean the next generation in this great American game of pass-the-parcel will be the one to run giggling out of the house with the still only partly unwrapped parcel secreted under their coat instead of passing it on to their children? I suspect so.

When I first met Nicole Kidman, she was a young actress with red ringlets and a golden future, whom I suspected immediately of being Australian. In the years since that first meeting, she has blossomed before my eyes—and before yours, to my immense personal irritation—into a fine, brunette actress, and the wife of Tom Cruise. It was with excitement and a strong sense of déjà vu therefore that I first read Alexandra Ringe's proposal to catch up with the newfangled Nicole and find out what makes her her, and her life today what it is.

For the same reasons, it was with immense displeasure—and again a strong sense of déjà vu—that I received Alexandra's telephone call informing me that, on reflection, she no longer considered the Kidman profile a viable one, and could she travel to Nagano, Japan to compile this year's **SPY** 100, viewing the worst people and events of 1997 through the lens of the 1998 Winter Olympics. Mindful of the old Asian proverb “be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it,” I acceded to Ringe's request, hoping that something horrific would befall her that might teach her to be more diligent in the future and to have more “follow through.” Nothing did, and you have, as a result, the wonderful magazine you see before you. Merry New Year!

The Editor

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Naked/city

Strange Days

An October 14th Visit to the Street Corner in Queens Where Rikers Island Prisoners Get Released

Free Men Barter for Beer, Cigarettes, and Prostitutes

3:15 A.M. In the darkened hours before sunrise on the 14th of October, I traverse the 59th St. Bridge. **John Denver** is dead. It has just been announced. As will many on this cold fall morning, I feel the need of a country road to take me home, perhaps to a "mountain momma." But instead, I am trudging through the darkness to Queens.

3:31 A.M. On Queens Plaza South, one of four ragged boulevards that form the Plaza, there is a closed newsstand, covered with gnomic graffiti. Could these cryptic marks, I wonder, have been made by the street gang **The Bloods**, currently reputed to be involved in a citywide program of civilian face-slashing? I open my paper and wait.

3:32 A.M. The cold darkness in Queens reminds me of today's **Beetle Bailey**. Beetle says to one of the sergeant's flunkies, "You expect us to sleep in this cold mud?" So the underling goes to the Sergeant and says, "They want some warm mud." I can't smile knowing just hours ago 120,000

condolences written for the late **Princess Diana** were shredded.

4:00 A.M. Police officers, TV's famous **NYPD**, are everywhere—leaning in doorways, waiting in blue-and-whites around the plaza, circling adjacent blocks. **Abner Louima** just got out of the hospital. He'd hate it here, I think; he alleges that he was sexually assaulted with a plunger by **Justin Volpe**, a policeman, and he needs another operation to reattach part of his colon.

4:10 A.M. Many inexpensive-looking prostitutes are flooding into the area, unbothered by police. The women are

readying themselves for the "troops." I wonder if some customers will present them with a sharply angled sexual organ, as it has just emerged the **President** of the United States of America allegedly did to **Paula Jones**. Like all civilized and charitable men, I can only assume that if he did, he was intoxicated.

4:57 A.M. The Q101—Rikers Island Limited—a public bus, stops one block east at Jackson Avenue and disgorges its passengers, among them 30 newly released convicts. Carrying brown-paper prison bags, they move through the desolation of the Plaza. I wonder if a similar

bus will one day disgorge TV's **Marv Albert**, the ruined sportscaster, whose sentencing for assault and battery is a mere ten days away.

5:10 A.M. **Brothers & Son Grocery Deli** on the corner locks its doors to released prisoners ("All they do is steal") and dispenses goods through a hole in a bulletproof shield. In the window of





donuts. None of them, luckily, seem to be suffering from **Gourmand Syndrome**, the newly discovered brain-disorder that can leave its victim craving brie. On the block, both **Twin Donut** and **Dunkin' Donuts** vie for custom. But Twin draws the crowds. For one, their variety is superior. Secondly, one of the Dunkin' Donuts workers told me he "doesn't like blacks. Fighting, drugs. The blacks are no good."

the Deli are magazines: *Nugget*, *Swinger*, *Busty*, *Stacked*, *Jiggs*, *Butt Lust*. There is also a copy of *The National Enquirer*, which trumpeted in a headline this week that thanks to the efforts of **Ellen Degeneres**, "It's cool to be gay in Hollywood." A riot of consumption begins. The prostitutes swarm. The men without money begin bartering at the shop. It is not clear what they could be trading; it's curious that for men coming directly from jail, money is not an issue. Those with prostitutes depart to have sex.

Since many of the prisoners are black, Twin is their obvious choice. I eat a **Blimpie** submarine sandwich, packed with cheap meat and withered vegetables.

5:40 A.M. Drugs are available here on the Plaza. Five and ten dollar bags of something are conveniently packaged in little blue baggies. Drugs are very bad for you. It has just been revealed that the doctor who injected Welshman **Dylan Thomas** with cortisone, morphine, and Benzedrine thought he was helping a colorfully drunken writer when, actually, he was killing a genius in the deadly grip of a diabetic coma.

6:05 A.M. A Hispanic guy in a flimsy shirt claims it's his birthday and wants me to give him some money. I refuse, and he is weighed down with grief, not unlike the fat **Chris Farley**, who broke his seat recently in a movie theater. The pris-



5:20 A.M. The remaining guys enjoy their drinks and smokes, like **Axl Rose**, who has recently broken ground on his new **Slash**-less album, according to the new issue of *Icon Thoughtstyle* magazine. Forty-ouncers clink and remlink. As a chorus, the men explain that they were imprisoned for "quality-of-life crimes": turnstile jumping, public urination, shoplifting, jay-walking while black. They are bitter about this. A guy in a wife-beater and shredded jean shorts rails against the prison guards who stole his wallet. He is holding a copy of **Dean Koontz's** *Strangers*.

5:30 A.M. Alcohol, nicotine, and ejaculation taken care of, thoughts turn to



oners have all dispersed, except for one, who stands for a while, staring up at the lightening heavens. I reflect on **Oscar Wilde's** "I never saw a man who looked with such a wistful eye upon that little tent of blue which prisoners call the sky." The prisoner, the sky: yes, it's all right there in front of me.

Leftward Ho!

Eisner Gets 4 Grand an Hour; Haitian Workers Get 30 Cents



Hi ho! Hi ho! Hi ho!
It's off to work we go!
Sing Disney's Haitian slaves.
We spend our days in pain and sweat
For Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck
Long as we're physically able.
But one thing's certain you can bet:
We'll not see duck upon our table.

◆
Ho ho! Ho ho! Ho ho!
It's off to work I go!
Croons Disney's Michael Eisner.
I spend my days drawing
Profits from Mickey and Donald Duck,
While Haitians work to the bone.
But one thing certain; no debating:
I get plenty duck. Why? Because I own.

◆
So so! So so! So so!
You want capitalism's horrors to go?
Let Disney workers breathe for a spell,
Send Eisner to a plant to work like Hell,
And try a socialist revolution.
Maybe then we'll see a real solution.
Hi ho! Hi ho! Hi ho!

—Bernard Livingston's latest book is titled *The Ruling Class Can Kiss My Ass*.

What if the *Times* Were Santa?

Things the *New York Times* Has Found to be Either "Naughty" or "Nice"

NAUGHTY

- Canceling the day of a party
- Abbreviated policewomen outfits
- The satirical edge of progressive rock
- Surrealism
- Fuzzy cats
- Sheath dresses made of nylon
- The word "pressure"
- Texaco executives
- Foam at club parties
- References to specific airlines
- Pictures of underwear
- The vantage point of the voice in Aerosmith's *Nine Lives*
- Bits of *Waiting to Exhale*
- Show-and-tell antics in photo galleries
- The feel of a pink-and-black atrium
- The American Public
- The "girl wail" of Nell Carter
- French nomenclature like *tableaux vivant* or *poses plastiques*
- Bosnian thugs
- Genitalia
- The New Jersey Nets

NICE

- A rapport with your son
- A salary increase of \$2.265 million
- Old volcanic mudflows
- Sensing an overarching authorial vision
- A bountiful afternoon tea
- The girl next door
- A big breakfast of crickets
- Dark, damp environments
- Kasparov yielding up his bishop
- People on Prozac
- 12-volt outlets
- Sleeping upside down as a metaphor for the reoriented dimensions of sightless life
- Having a company
- Living in a public housing neighborhood
- The floor mats in a Camaro
- Software "bundling"
- Foam at club parties
- Something strangely nasty about the word "cloture"
- Salmon tartare, beets, and pea shoots
- Pirates Manager Gene Lamont
- Living in a country like France



Nature of the Beast

No. 21 The Reindeer

SPY's Ongoing Guide to the Power Players of the Animal Kingdom

"I'm not sure why they picked them to be Santa's helpers. They are very delicious, though. The meat is very lean; most think it tastes best when it's prepared medium rare. We serve reindeer sausage on our pizza at the restaurant, but you can get it in steaks, or really any way you'd get beef or venison. It is one of the only meats in the world that doesn't have any cholesterol and has very, very little fat. In fact, for people with cholesterol or heart problems, reindeer is actually healthier than fish in a lot of ways. It's not too gamey and most of it is fairly chewable and nice.

But I'm not sure why they picked them for Santa. I guess I have seen some pulling sleds, but it's hard to domesticate them, you know, like pets, because they just don't like to be around people. You can see them standing a couple together, or hundreds or thousands of them together, but a person gets too close and they're gone. The handlers have to be very careful on the reindeer farms when they [the reindeer] are shedding their velvet because the males [the male reindeer] get very aggressive and slash at people with their hooves. And they're much bigger than deer."—"Ed," barkeep at the Howling Dog Saloon, Alaska.



Pope-O-Matic Pick the Pope

As soon as the Pope dies, there'll be all this drama in the Vatican about "Oh, what's the new Pope going to be called? Oh! Oh! Oh!" But here in the real world, the suspense is already deeply bearable. As representatives of the secular, gum-chewing community, we therefore offer the following Pope-O-Matic for use by the massed, nail-chewing cardinals as they wait for the new Pope to choose himself a name. Pick one term from **BOX A** and one from **BOX B**.

Do not use for wagering.

BOX A

JOHN
PAUL
JOHN-PAUL

BOX B

"The n^{th} ," where $n = 1 +$ the number of times a Pope has already been called the name from Box A.

GRAND MARNIER® CAFÉ

HOT COFFEE

1 OZ. GRAND MARNIER

TOP WITH WHIPPED CREAM



ADDING GRAND MARNIER TO ONE'S COFFEE CAN ALSO CREATE A STIR.

Grand Marnier®
IT CHANGES EVERYTHING.



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Rock-Paper-Scissors: Deluxe Edition

How best to express that relationship between three parties whereby **PARTY A** whips **PARTY B**'s butt; **PARTY B** whips the butt of **PARTY C**; and at the same time—crucially—**PARTY C** completes the circuit, and whips the butt of **PARTY A**? Well, there is the ol' rock-paper-scissors model. Rock blunts scissors. Scissors cut paper. No problem—as long as you can handle the rank inadequacy of "paper covers rock." Would a rock particularly mind being covered in paper? No. For the serious playground specialist, therefore, here are three much smoother, and slightly more newsworthy—*Stop the presses! Rock Blunts Scissors!*—versions of the same triangle.



JFK put the squeeze on the Mafia; mafioso Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald; Oswald, just for the sake of argument, shot JFK.



Diana managed to quit binge eating; bingeing on booze and antidepressants rendered Henri Paul unfit to drive; Henri Paul's terrible driving killed Diana.



Breast cancer afflicts photographer Linda McCartney; Linda campaigns against animal testing; animal testing could conceivably one day beat breast cancer.

Alien Gangs

Russian Mob Talk

Soon-to-be-Huge Phrases from the Hot New Type of Mafia

Films like *The Godfather* and, er, *The Godfather, Part II*, did more than humanize the fraternity of violent Italian criminals. They made us want to dress that way and to drink wine with each meal. But we also wanted their words. We wanted phrases like *o muerta* that had something to do with loyalty; and that "offer you can't refuse" thing; words, in short, for people accustomed to being taken seriously. Well, now there's a new crew in town. With Scorsese's *The Stout Henchman* due out next month, we thought it not premature to test drive the next big mob slang thing. —Peter Weverka (*Translations by Matt Steinglass*)

BORSCHT THE BASTARD: Rather than "whack" or "take care of" an enemy, a Russian mafioso prefers to "BORCHCHUY ETOVO SUKINOVO SINA," or "Borscht the bastard." Though "borscht" is the Russian term for "beet," the pun is unintentional. Russians "borscht" each other solely because of the physical resemblance between a fibrous bowl of beetroot soup and somebody you have just pistol-whipped to a pulp. Go too far, though, and your victim may "PLAVAYET S IKROI," "swim with the caviar."

LET'S JUST SAY I READ IT IN MY YOGURT: Information, to a Russian mobster, is information. He is not a librarian, feverishly crediting his sources; when he knows something—that you have been skimming his profits for instance—he simply knows it. "NU, SKAZHEM YA ETO CHITAL V SVOYEI PROSTOKVASHE" refers, of course, to the classic 1985 showdown between Anatoly Karpov and Gary Kasparov, when the latter accused the former of receiving chess hints via a coded system of potted creamy snacks.

BEAT UP MY SISTER. SEE IF I CARE: Russian organized crime would soon collapse without its rigidly observed code of family loyalty, a code which dictates one treat one's family like absolute strangers or animals. "NU IZBYEI SESTRU MOIU. MNE TO CHTO" or "Beat up my sister. See if I care," is roughly equivalent to the English phrase "Oh really?"

Caption Contest

Caption a *New Yorker* Illustration and Win Vague Prizes

health crisis we through the
ganize care by will I get th
we've night
town- of a c
reedom eightie.
been ting shiv
How can you mourning durin
when you're gather each nig
the V-dich



"I'd like to introduce Mr. Edward Whittaker, my 'side-meat'."

—Chuck Wonsley, MA.

SEND ENTRIES TO: The New Yorker
Caption Contest, SPY Magazine, 49 E. 21st
St. 11th Floor, New York, NY, 10010

SPY Invoice

Counting the Cost of Top-Drawer Magazine Writing

From *CIGAR AFICIONADO*

Editor, Marvin Shanken

"The pilot wrestles the plane like a seasoned cowboy on a bucking bronco as it rolls from side to side and then quickly jumps up and down."

—Paid to James Suckling: \$27.00

From *INTERVIEW*

Editor, Ingrid Sischy

"Ingrid Sischy, the editor of this esteemed periodical, calls to get a story out of me. I picture Ingrid wearing a visor, eased back in her chair with her feet up on her desk; the sunlight filters through the venetian blinds, cutting a swath through the thick cigar smoke."

—Paid to Lypsinka (a drag queen): \$52.00

From *SALON*

Editor, David Talbot

"Reading Ellroy can be like deciphering Morse code tapped out by a pair of barely sentient testicles."

—Paid to Dwight Garner: \$6.80

From *THE NEW YORKER*

Editor, Tina Brown

"She wasn't just beautiful. She was like the sun coming up: coming up giggling."

—Paid to Clive James: \$42.00

Totals based on informed speculation as to per-word rates of individual magazines. Samples have not been edited for clarity.

Press Release Bluff Call

Mistress of the Unripped Bodice

Dame Barbara Cartland is the world's best selling author, a cosmetics expert, and accidental step-gran of the late ex-Princess of Wales (which, to a Romantic Authoress, must be like taking a nitrous hit at the very moment your horse wins the Irish Sweepstakes). Reached at her unimaginable home in the "shires" of England, Dame Barbara defended herself ably against charges of unfocused carpet leafleting.

SPY: Why did you send SPY a press release for your commemorative biography of Princess Diana?

DAME BARBARA CARTLAND: Don't talk too fast. I can't hear a word. You'll have to shout. This is a new...a new fittings which is absolutely ghastly I've got to tell you.

SPY: Why did you send SPY a press release for your commemorative biography of Princess Diana?

DBC: I'm not doing a Diana book. This is entirely people making it up. I am not writing a book about her.

SPY: Are you serious?

DBC: I wrote a preface for one book. That's all I've done. What happened with Diana was...and it's here that everybody gets the story wrong...I knew her first a long time ago, before my daughter married her father, you see, and she was madly keen on my books. I mean, of course I've lost it but I had a very good photograph that he took of

comes from the heart *and* the soul. Don't you think that's a frightfully good thing to say?

SPY: That is nice.

DBC: I put that in many of my books. If you think about it, it's the most extraordinary thing.

SPY: Why do you think Diana and her sisters all had eating disorders?

DBC: What, dear?

SPY: The eating disorders. Why do you think Diana and her sisters were all plagued by bulimia?

DBC: Do I think that anybody will replace her?

SPY: No, I was wondering if you had any thoughts about the eating disorders.

DBC: A what?

SPY: The eating disorders?

DBC: Er...no, I think what you're asking is what are we going to buy for her?

SPY: Pardon?

DBC: Or spend the money on?

SPY: Er...yes.

DBC: Well, what I thought, and this is entirely my own idea, was that what she would like would be to have a lovely, lovely place for the children when they're ill. In other words, a wonderful place entirely for small children. And outside, I should put a thing which people could



Why did you, (right) send SPY a press release for your commemorative biography of Princess Diana (left)?

her sitting up in bed with three Barbara Cartlands, you see? And I think my books did have a great effect on her because she was so pleased about them because they talked only about love. The reason I don't sell in England is that I don't write about sex, you see. I must tell you this just in passing. You...you...the Russians have got a beautiful thing. They say that love

leave flowers at—if they like, of course—but all done with flowers.

SPY: Yeah, that's nice.

DBC: You see when it's all done with flowers it'll look very pretty for the children. At the same time they could bring something to put there. They want to put something down even if it's a small thing. Well, that's the sort of thing she would appreciate.

Where's Bubbles?

Chapter One: A Chimp Goes Missing

In Which the Author Sets Out on an Epic Journey to Locate and Interview the Chimpanzee Known as Bubbles

Call me Isobel. I first started wondering what had happened to Bubbles when Michael Jackson announced that he was going to be a father. Like most decent people, I am unhesitatingly critical of anything Michael Jackson does or tries to do, and among the many arguments I came up with for why the reclusive entertainer should be prevented from siring a child was this: *Michael Jackson shares his home with an adult chimpanzee named Bubbles. It will surely eat the baby.*



But then it occurred to me that perhaps my facts were stale. When I thought of Bubbles, I pictured him with the *eighties* Michael: the single-gloved sequins-and-sunglasses Michael; the one who met Reagan. But had I ever seen the chimp with the Michael of today? As I made, in my mind, an inventory of The Universe, there was an unmistakable hole where there should have been a chimp.

My first thought was not that Bubbles had probably grown old and died. My first thought was simply this: where *is* Bubbles? For unrelated social reasons, I happened to call a friend at *Vogue*—a person with her finger on the apevine, if you will—and I asked if she knew anything about the fate or whereabouts

of Bubbles. "Oh yes," she said cheerfully. "There's no mystery there. Bubbles got drunk at Larry Fortensky's bachelor party [he was marrying Elizabeth Taylor] and misbehaved. So the next day, Michael had Bubbles shot."

To say that I, a professional journalist, found this information interesting is like saying TV's Tony Little finds exercise equipment interesting. Michael Jackson having his best friend killed! The first news hound to break *that* story would surely have a feather of tree-like proportions in his or her journalistic cap.

Thus I began my search for a hairy little fellow who at one time had been the purported best friend of the world's most famous artiste. I gave myself two weeks for the task, little suspecting that my investigation would take me all the way to Los Angeles. Or that what I would find would surprise me to my very core.—Isobel Waxman

NEXT ISSUE: The Wildlife Waystation for Unwanted Chimps

Enough Already

Spare the Buddhist

Only One of These Richard Gere Legends Has Any Basis in Fact

- A. He once visited an emergency room with a gerbil in his rectum.
- B. His middle name is Tiffany.
- C. He has a collection of more than eight cars.
- D. He was breast-fed until the age of seven.
- E. He owes Cindy C. exactly one million dollars.
- F. SPY has a photo of Gere in a T-shirt that reads "I Don't Have All Day/Split Me in Half!"



(ANSWER: B)



Street Ethics

For Fur's Sake

Models Would Rather Go Naked than Wear Fur (*What about You?*)

"I think I'd rather go naked than have to live through my teens again. That was the worst, most weird time I've ever had."

—Jenira Kerm, 27, Stockbroker

Spot the Fraud

All of the Following Metaphors Were Devised by *New York Post's* Steve Dunleavy, Except One

- A. "Money and fame are not The Wall of China to insulate you from that word 'Tragedy.'"
- B. "And you, the American public, eat cat food from the hand of a dog."
- C. "The U.S. Supreme Court is at best culpably wrong, or at worst, they are playing football without helmets."
- D. "Mario Cuomo...is barbecuing with the leprechauns."
- E. "If Mike Wallace let a question like that wither on the vine, his longtime executive producer, Don Hewitt, would have drop-kicked him through the journalistic goal posts of God."
- F. "[T]he cruise ship's accordionist was covered with a soft blanket of snow."

(ANSWER: F)

Straight News Story

Why is the President's Name Not Marmaduke, and the Vice President's Name Not Bartholomew?

Because Democrats, Across the Board, Have Shorter Names Than Republicans

It has come to our attention that Democrats in Congress have first names that are, on average, more than half a letter shorter than the names of their Republican enemies. And according to a practicing, respectable statistician enlisted by SPY, this is more than just some random coincidence.

Our survey, which began by measuring the names of all 579 officials in Congress, revealed that, on average, a House Republican's name was longer by .413 letters than that of his Democratic counterpart. In the Senate, GOP names were longer by .593 letters; among the heads of Senate subcommittees they were longer by the astronomical figure of 1.41 letters.

Coincidence? Not in the view of Dr. Daniel Rabinowitz, a top statistician at Columbia University. According to Dr. R., the probability of the name-length discrepancy being a fluke is only 0.36%. In layman's terms, this means our observation is approximately 100% true and meaningful.

So whither American politics now? We tried to find out.

Democratic officials, famously au fait with the currents of popular thought, drew upon pop psychology to explain the Name-Length Differential. "Republicans have longer names because they're trying to compensate for a lack of something else—like ideas," said saucy Amy Tobe, a spokesperson at the Democratic National Committee. "Republicans have policy envy," she added, "and think that when it comes to names, size matters."

The Republicans themselves tried to explain away the data by blaming the press. A spokesperson for the Republican National Committee ranted that "The media applies a double standard. They will call Reagan 'Ronald' Reagan, not 'Ron' Reagan;

but they won't call Albert Gore 'Albert' Gore. They'll call him 'Al' Gore." This allegation is false, however; our survey is based, to paraphrase Julie Andrews, only on the names politicians call themselves.

Lisa Myers, Chief Congressional correspondent at NBC, reckoned that "Republicans tend to be a little more formal, and to come from districts where people are a little more conservative." But she also remarked that fear of appearing stuffy on tele-

vision had caused politicians *in general* to use short names. It should be noted, however, that "Tippecanoe", "Caligula" and "Old Hickory" all predate television considerably.

The controversial host of MSNBC's *The News with Brian Williams*, and blow-dried future King Anchor, postulated that name length is manipulated systematically for financial gain. "Many Democrats I have spoken to say a shorter name means you're more likely to get your fund-raising call re-

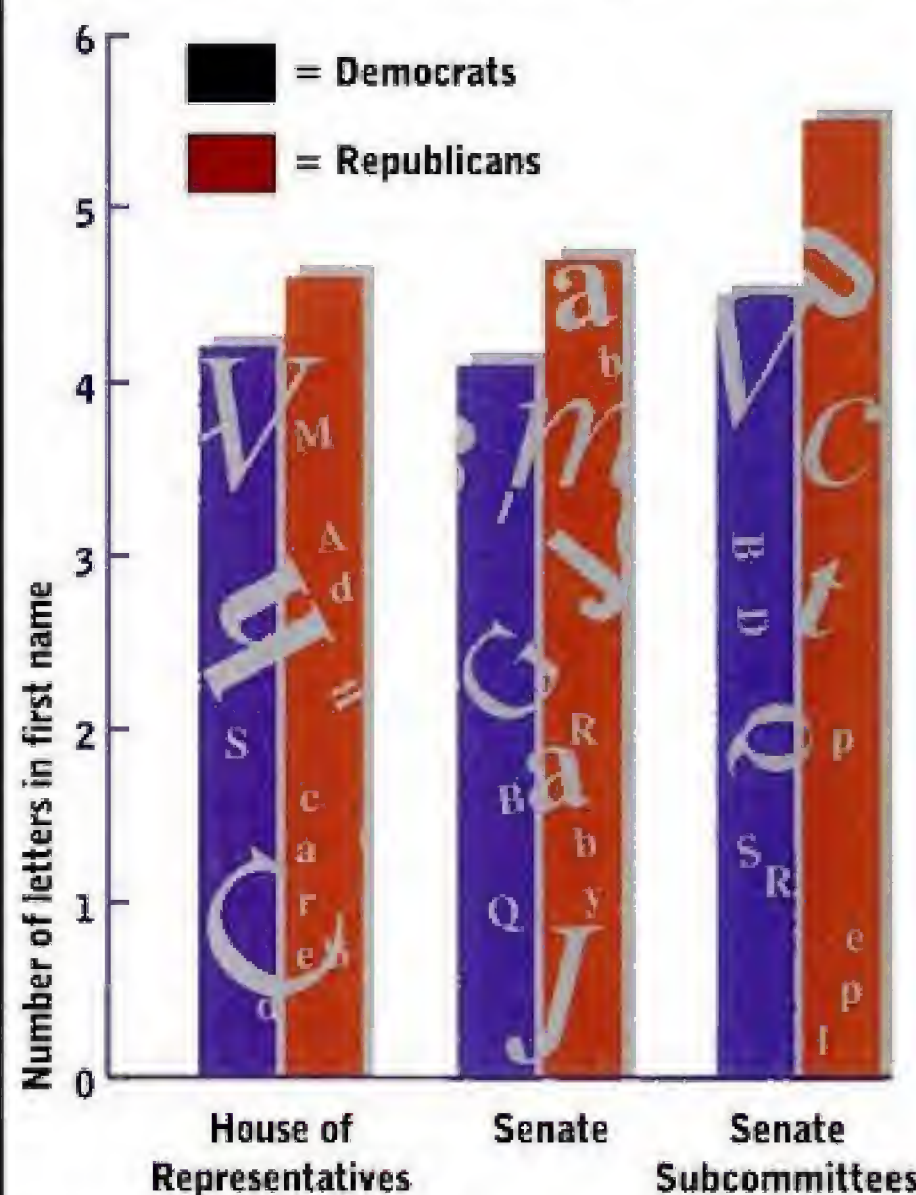
turned. In the fund-raising community shorter is just plain catchier."

Sadly, some chose to thumb their noses at Dr. Rabinowitz and challenge the very significance of our findings. "It seems to be an interesting factoid," said John Cochran, chief Capitol Hill correspondent for ABC News, "but I think it's just an accident of nature." Likewise, "Hal" Bruno, eponymous host of "Hal Bruno's Washington," a radio talk show, took an even harder line. "I don't think anything about it. I'm not interested in this sort of stuff. I think it's ridiculous. I don't care. I mean why would anybody care about anything like that?" The short-named Mr. Bruno's question was clearly rhetorical, and just as clearly tinged with desperation.

Perhaps most interesting, though, was Jeff Greenfield, correspondent for ABC's *Nightline*. When contacted Mr. Greenfield chose to pretend to be his own secretary, answering the phone "Jeff Greenfield's line," telling SPY to "hold on a second," putting down the receiver, waiting a while, and then picking it up again and saying "Jeff Greenfield."

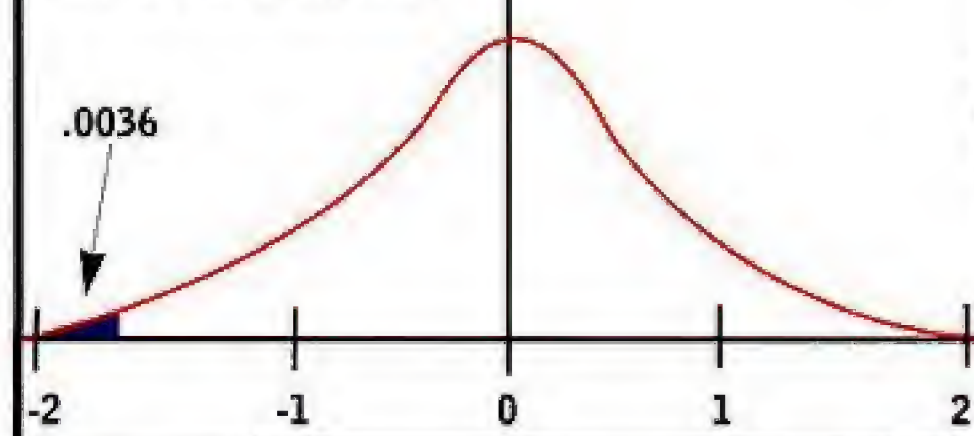
After he had performed this operation on three separate occasions, we called back and addressed him as "Mr. Greenfield" while still in the pretending-to-be-his-own-secretary mode. He had no opinion on the matter of names.

AVERAGE LENGTH OF FIRST NAMES



COINCIDENCE? MATH BEGS TO DIFFER

SHADED AREA = Probability that it's all a big fluke



Separated at Birth?



Dancing mossback Carol Channing...



...and lisping hunchback Rudy Giuliani?



Financially compromised Steffi Graf...



...and facially paralyzed Garry Shandling?



The heavily invested Oprah Winfrey...



...and the possibly injected Lisa Rinna?

Merchandising Trends

Celebrity Scraps & Offal

Alfie of Alfie's Autographs in Hollywood Quoted the Following Prices for Various Celebrity Meat-Products —Greg Beato

JOAN RIVERS' belly fat:	\$200
ROSEANNE'S hip lard:	\$100 per small vial, \$2,000 for whole crate
COURTNEY LOVE'S nose scraps:	\$2,000-\$3,000
*MARLON BRANDO'S bum suet:	\$1,000-\$2,000
CHER'S entire ass:	\$1,000-\$2,000
*GARRY SHANDLING any part:	\$0
EVANDER HOLYFIELD'S ear debris:	\$5,000
*TOM CRUISE'S Scientological	
nose-cartilage:	\$5,000
MICHAEL JACKSON any part:	\$4,000-\$5,000
PAMELA ANDERSON LEE'S breast	
implants, if she had them removed:	\$10,000

*PLASTIC SURGERY AS YET HYPOTHETICAL

Empty 'Bildungs'

The Internet Prolongs Its Cybermitzvah

A Compendium of Dusty Prognostications About the Most Boring Subject in the World

The coming of age of the Internet has generated countless dubious pronouncements, but none quite so self-defeating as the claim that the Internet has come of age. Genuinely mature media—newspapers, television, sidewalk preachers—do not inspire incessant stories about their maturity. The Internet, on the other hand, is like a toddler proudly hailed as a big boy every time he goes potty with slightly less mess than expected.—*Daniel Radosh*

"Princess Diana's death shows how the World Wide Web is fast coming of age as a legitimate news medium."

—*Wall Street Journal*, 1997

"Mars trek is Net's coming of age."

—*Toronto Star*, 1997

"The Internet came of age in 1996. If the surveys are to be believed, the number of users around the world topped 50 million."

—*New Statesman*, 1996

"If there was any doubt that the Internet has come of age as a potent force in our society, Internet World, being held in New York this week, has erased that."

—*Seattle Times*, 1996

"Just last week, the Internet came of age when for the first time authorities discovered and halted a pyramid scheme."

—*Washington Post*, 1996

"Michael Kinsley's...decision to leave cable TV's Crossfire to edit an Internet magazine... [is] another sign that the Net is coming of age as a news outlet."

—*O'Dwyer's PR Services Report*, 1996

"Internet's tangled web came of age in 1995."

—*Rocky Mountain News*, 1995

"One sign that the Internet has come of age is this year's mania over Internet stock offerings."

—*Budapest Business Journal*, 1995

"Cyberspace comes of age. The World Wide Web, the Internet multimedia information-retrieval system, appears on the verge of becoming a mass medium."

—*New York Times*, 1995

"The Internet has come of age, at least in the eyes of the world's massive telecommunications industry."

—*South China Morning Post*, 1995

"1994 was the year that the Internet came of age."

—*The Irish Times*, 1995

"The Wide-Area Information Server on the Internet is ready for its commercial debut, as a popular grass roots application comes of age."

—*Computerworld*, 1993

"The global Internet: the 'academic toy' comes of age."

—*Telecommunications*, 1993

Minority Gift Guide

What Do You Get the Man Who Has Everything Except White Skin and/or Sexual Feelings Toward Women?

Stores Find Poverty-Stricken Blacks Tough to Shop for, Oddball Homosexuals Slightly Easier

We started with a relatively simple holiday-issue question: what do you get The Man Who Has Everything: the standard malt-swigging cyborg, multitasking with his uplinked video wristwatch while getting a scalp massage from his golf bag sort of guy. Posing vaguely as the gift-guide editors of various magazines, we started calling providers of goods and services to find out. Harmless fun.

After a few days of calling, however, certain patterns, of the sort that commonly win people Pulitzer prizes, began to emerge in the data. If we contacted a store as a representative of *Out*, the gay magazine, we would invariably be urged to feature a wackier, zanier item than if we called from *GQ*, the one-time bible of the straight, white male.

Fair enough, you say; it's no secret that gay culture places a certain emphasis on the cultivation of creative, freethinking personalities. But that doesn't explain why, when we called "from" *Vibe*, the magazine of *black* culture, the gifts suggested were all cheap, unimaginative, and utterly lacking in what hip-hoppers call "flava." Are retailers less squeamish about thinking their way into the *gay* subculture than into the *black* one?

IF HE READS *OUT*: Skirt, \$20

IF HE READS *VIBE*: A pair of swimming trunks, \$18

BROOKSTONE, NYC

IF HE READS *GQ*: 18-piece barbecue set, \$100

IF HE READS *OUT*: Personal weather center, \$60 to \$120

IF HE READS *VIBE*: Universal remote control, \$49

DR. ELLIOTT ROSE, Plastic Surgeon

IF HE READS *GQ*: For "an edge in workplace competition," either body contouring, \$4,000 to \$9,000, neck liposuction, \$4,000 to \$9,000, or breast reduction, \$8,000 to \$10,000

IF HE READS *OUT*: For "an enhanced masculine appearance," either pectoral augmentation, \$2,500 to \$5,000; or odoplasty, for "sharp, assertive features," \$2,500 to \$6,000

IF HE READS *VIBE*: Tattoo removal, \$750, or ear un-piercing, \$500 to \$1,250, or nose operation "to make nostrils more caucasian looking," \$500 to \$1,500



CRATE & BARREL

IF HE READS *GQ*: Compresso coffee-maker, \$229

IF HE READS *OUT*: Sample pack of fruit salsa \$20; or log cabin birdhouse, \$37

IF HE READS *VIBE*: Martini glass, \$12

T.J. MAXX

IF HE READS *GQ*: Wood Humidor, \$199

IF HE READS *OUT*: Novelty necktie \$19.99

IF HE READS *VIBE*: Ashtray, \$14.99

WARNER BROTHERS STORE

IF HE READS *GQ*: Leather Superman jacket, \$1,250

IF HE READS *OUT*: Leather Batman & Robin jacket, \$1,450

IF HE READS *VIBE*: Ice bucket with tongs shaped like Bugs Bunny, \$435

ZCMI DEPARTMENT STORE, Salt Lake City

IF HE READS *GQ*: "The scriptural injunction 'What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?'"

IF HE READS *OUT*: "I would give him a vivid memory of who helped him get thing upon thing until he had everything."

IF HE READS *VIBE*: "I would give him an appreciative heart."

GODIVA CHOCOLATES

IF HE READS *GQ*: Gift basket, \$125

IF HE READS *OUT*: Holiday tin, "for creative types," \$37

IF HE READS *VIBE*: "Affordable" chocolate Santa, \$14

BOOMBASTIK, NYC

IF HE READS *GQ*: Suit coat, \$90

BARNES & NOBLE

IF HE READS *GQ*: *Golf Magazine's Complete Book of Golf Instruction*, by G. Peper; Abrams, \$45

IF HE READS *OUT*: *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years*, by D. Vaughan; Aperture, \$75

IF HE READS *VIBE*: *Courtney Love* by Poppy Z. Brite; Simon & Schuster, \$25

CONDOMANIA

IF HE READS *GQ*: Penis-desensitizing gel, \$7.95

IF HE READS *OUT*: Flavored lubricants, \$9.95

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A Life in Bitches

Mohammed Emad "Dodi" Fayed: Man on a Mission

What Do You Get the Dad Who Has Everything Except a British Passport?

For years, his billionaire dad had tried and failed—buying Harrods, *Punch* magazine, a soccer team, befriending England's notoriously standoffish Queen—to win the hearts of the British. Not discouraged, Mohammed Emad "Dodi" Fayed embarked on a much more systematic program of heterosexual photo ops, working his way up the ladder of groovy, Western trophy women (weathering dim early triumphs, as well as actual setbacks) until, in time, he managed to wine and dine—though accidentally kill—Diana, the Ex-Princess of Wales, and former future queen of England. SPY takes an appreciative backwards glance at Dodi's Ladder of Success.

NAME: Tania Bryer

WESTERN CULTURAL CAPITAL: *British* TV anchor, host of Sky TV's *Showbiz Weekly*. "Underneath the Chanel suit," says Tania, "is a very steely and determined person."

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★**NAME: Charlotte Hambro**

WCC: Granddaughter of England's firm but fair wartime capo, *Winston Churchill*. Had affair with husband of *Camilla Parker Bowles*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★**NAME: Cathy Lee Crosby**

WCC: 1970s *Circus of the Stars* performer; ex-wife of *pro-football's Joe Theismann*; chronic fatigue sufferer; recently penned *self-help* book titled *Let the Magic Begin*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★**NAME: Lynsey De Paul**

WCC: Runner up, 1977 *Eurovision Song Contest*; current projects include an album of songs for the *Eurotunnel* and wreaking twisted revenge on ex-boyfriend *Sean Connery*; wears *beret*; has mole on face.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★**NAME: Charlotte Lewis**

WCC: Has appeared on *Seinfeld* as one of Jason Alexander's many implausible girlfriends; *has "issues"*: "I wish the movies I do could be like my photo layouts, where I look like I've just been raped."

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★**NAME: Valerie Perrine**

WCC: Light comedienne last seen in *Superman*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★**NAME: Marie Helvin**

WCC: Best friend of Jerry Hall, wife of *Mick Jagger*; *Southern California*-style health nut. "By not eating, you rest your internal system and relax your vital organs so that energy can be used in other parts of the body, even the brain."

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★**NAME: Tina Sinatra**

WCC: Daughter of still-alive-at-press-time musical *Italian*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★**NAME: Daryl Hannah**

WCC: Ex-flame of *JFK, Jr.* Perpetuated *Danish* mermaid myth in movie *Splash*. *Has blonde. hair.*

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★★**NAME: Patsy Kensit**

WCC: Feigned orgasm in *Lethal Weapon 2*; currently married to *Englishman Liam Gallagher*; previously married to haggis-faced *Scot, Jim Kerr* from Simple Minds.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★**NAME: Princess Stephanie**

WCC: Unamused andromorph offspring of *Grace Kelly*; quite tall; *princess of European country*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★★**NAME: Britt Ekland**

WCC: Former *Bond girl*; ex-wife of paranoid comic actor *Peter Sellers*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★★★★**NAME: Koo Stark**

WCC: Has seen England's *Prince Andrew* naked.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★**NAME: Joanne Whalley**

WCC: *British* actress; formerly married to former *Doors* frontman Val Kilmer.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★★**NAME: Julia Roberts**

WCC: Big-bummed cinema star; no qualms about flaunting *nice ankles*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★★★★**NAME: Winona Ryder**

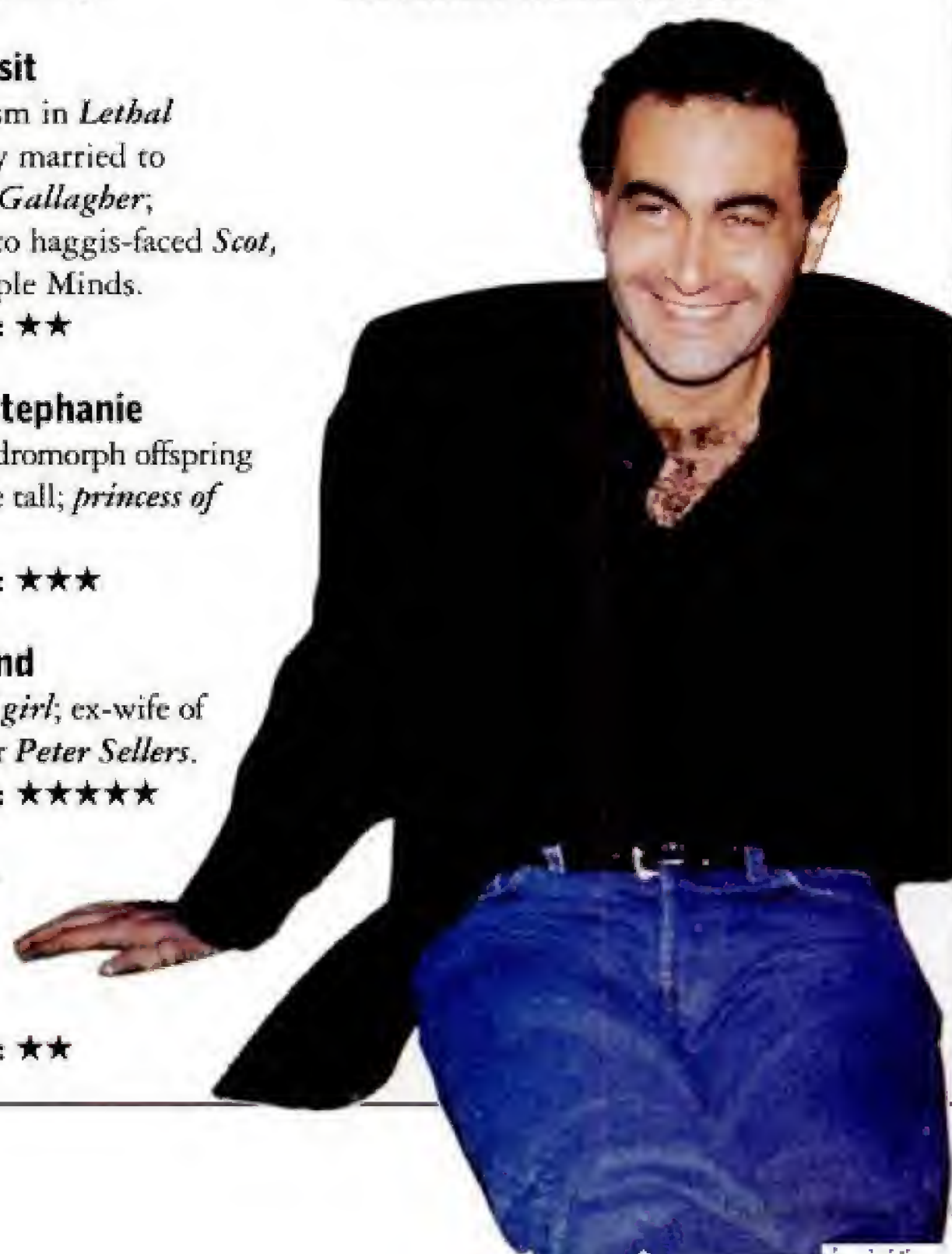
WCC: Hunched, teensy *Gen-X* icon; real name *Horowitz*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★★★★**NAME: Brooke Shields**

WCC: Star of unspeakable *NBC* sitcom *Suddenly Susan*; wife of physically *Dodier* tennis star *Andre Agassi*.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: ★★★★★**NAME: Diana Windsor**

WCC: Infinite. Former future queen of *England*; blond; body-image "issues"; friend of *Sting*; buried with brutish *Sicilian-style* dinner ring, though ring unfortunately gift from Egyptian.

PAPARAZZI VALUE: INFINITE

PARTY POOP

BIBLICAL PROPHECY EXTRA



1 Dust shalt thou eat.

2 And though you be a prince of a small nation, the Lord shalt disclose your head to be bald and your features unexceptional.



3



4



5



6

3 But one among you who believeth not shall cry, "Behold, on high!" that he might reckon the number of the chins of the woman Ursula Andress.

4 And yea to this pestilence shall be added blindness. The son shall not know the mother, nor the mother the son, nor Isabella Rosselini her agent, though each be in the same room eating small, free, avocado sandwiches.

5 Howsoever thou shalt open thy mouth it shall be not wide enough to receiveth the Lord, be it wide as the banks of the Tyra.

6 Yea in these final days the motley shall spill their seed upon the Beast and reproduceth.





THE "PLOT" THICK'UNS

WHY PEOPLE SHOULD STOP WHINING ABOUT MOVIES WHOSE PLOTS

DON'T HANG TOGETHER AND JUST DEAL. BY TOBY YOUNG

As head of 20th Century Fox, Darryl Zanuck didn't even bother to take his cigar out of his mouth when writers pestered him about "plot holes" in the stories they were adapting for him. He referred them to a survey the studio had conducted which revealed that 60% of movie-goers entered theaters after a film had started, watched it through to the end, and remained in their seats until they'd caught up with the bit they'd missed.

What did they care about logical inconsistencies? Plot holes, schmata holes. Back then they bought their movies by the hour.

These days a majority of movie-goers, at least in America, watch films from the beginning, and have presumably decided to start caring about whether the plots make sense or not. At least the critics think they should. Listening to them complain about this summer's crop of blockbusters, you'd think that coherent plotting was one of Hollywood's lost arts. Films like *The Saint*, *Con Air* and *Speed 2* prompted a barrage of abuse from movie critics regarding the verisimilitude, plausibility, and logical continuity of their storylines. "Simon West's *Con Air*, from a screenplay by Scott Rosenberg, is the first movie I can remember that lost me in the pre-credit sequence," wrote Andrew Sarris in *The New York Observer*. He went on to accuse the film's makers of "surreal stupidity."

Slate, Michael Kinsley's white-shoe on-line magazine, even went so far as to introduce an irregular column called "Plot Holes," billed as "an occasional series assessing the narrative logic of movies." "We have recently crossed an important cultural divide," began the

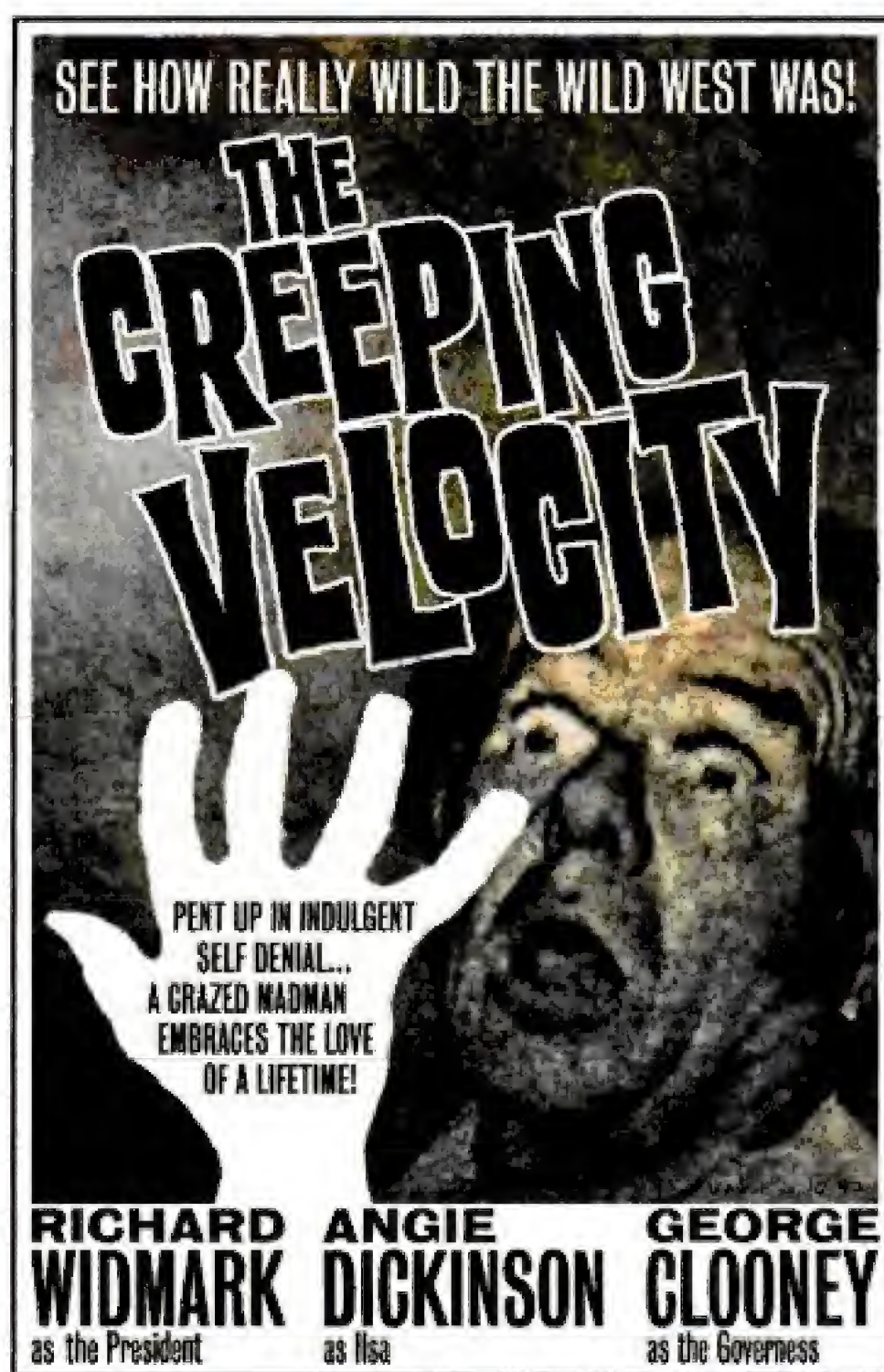
first one, by screenwriter Stephen Harrigan. "Movies now make less sense than rock lyrics." He proceeded to describe this sum-

mer's movie season as "a festival of incoherence." Harrigan's recent screenwriting credits include the 1995 made-for-television movie *The O.J. Simpson Story*.

There's something a bit irritating about all this. I can understand why someone on the periphery of the movie business would have ambitions to become a film critic, but Harrigan comes off as an aspiring video store clerk. The nose-ringed, camouflage-pants-wearing geeks who work in funky, downtown video outlets are precisely the sort of pedants who will bore you for hours about the logical inconsistencies of *The Big Sleep*. It's a way of asserting their superiority to both the popular audience, who are assumed to be too stupid to notice such things, and the film makers, who for all their wizardry haven't managed to hoodwink these eagle-eyed cinephiles.

Such pettiness seems more appropriate to auditing someone's tax return than assessing a movie. If you pause for a second to consider the films you really like, their plots often make no more sense than the ones you hate. It's true that a gaping plot hole can bring you up short and interfere with your enjoyment of a movie, but the fact that you noticed it at all means there's already something wrong with the film in question. A good movie sweeps you up and carries you along with it and you're no more aware of the way the plot's constructed than you are of the fact that the people up on screen are only actors.

Even film critics are occasionally capable of suspending disbelief. The movies singled out for praise this year—*Men In Black*, *Face/Off*, *L.A. Confidential*—had plots every bit as ludicrous as the movies the critics condemned. I agree with *Variety*'s Todd McCarthy that *L.A. Confidential* is "the best noir thriller since *Chinatown*," but



I bet even he couldn't tell me what happens to the 25 lbs. of heroin that are stolen in the opening scene. The rule of thumb would appear to be that when critics like a film they pay scant attention to its narrative logic, but when they dislike it they rationalize their reaction by picking holes in the plot.

The missing heroin in *L.A. Confidential* is what Alfred Hitchcock called "the McGuffin." By using a random, empty term like this, Hitchcock intended to convey just how meaningless he thought such plot devices were. It would be easy to quote various directors, particularly Howard Hawks, on why plots don't matter much, but perhaps the best way to illustrate this point is to draw attention to some of the cavernous plot holes in classic movies.

Take *Casablanca*. The McGuffin in *Casablanca* is the letters of transit which derive their value from the fact that, to quote the character played by Peter Lorre, they're "signed by General de Gaulle himself." If you stop to think for a moment, this doesn't make any sense. Why would Nazi officials be remotely impressed by documents bearing the signature of the leader of the Free French? A person brandishing these papers would have no more luck getting out of Casablanca than if he presented the local Commandant with letters of transit signed by Winston Churchill.

In the opening scene of *Citizen Kane*, there's no one present to hear the dying Kane utter the word "Rosebud." Consequently, the journalist's quest to discover who or what "Rosebud" was—the McGuffin of *Citizen Kane*—is completely illogical.

The narrator of *Sunset Boulevard*, played by William Holden, is floating face-down in a swimming pool at the beginning of the movie. The history of this last example is instructive. The original version of *Sunset Boulevard* opened with a scene in a morgue with the William Holden character lying on a slab. The dead man sits up and narrates the story to all the other corpses who gather round to listen to his tale. In a sense, this was less illogical than the scene Billy Wilder replaced it with since at least it addressed, in an admittedly supernatural way, the problem of how the story could be narrated by a dead man.

The reason Wilder scrapped this scene is because it established the wrong mood. The talking corpse provoked titters during a test screening and gave rise to expectations that the film, a fairly somber satire, subsequently confounded. *Sunset Boulevard* isn't exactly a genre picture—it's too original for that—but it sticks loosely enough to the rules of film noir for the original

opening, which belongs in a comedy, to register as an aberration.

It's this kind of inconsistency, rather than a straightforwardly logical one, that can ruin a movie. *Con Air* fails because it doesn't strike the right balance of pumped-up action and camp satire, not because the plot setup is so implausible. Provided a film is internally consistent, provided it sticks to the rules of its genre, it doesn't matter whether the story hangs together or not. *The Usual Suspects* works—even though Keyser Soze's motivation for perpetrating his elaborate ruse is never explained—because it remains faithful to its noir-ish roots.

If there is anything wrong with the flimsy plotting of contemporary blockbusters, it is that they are symptoms of a more general intellectual problem. The studios appear to be under the impression that if you work out the psychological profiles of a movie's main characters with enough care, everything else will fall into place. In *Independence Day*, for instance, each character has a psychological "wound" which can only be healed by confronting the aliens in battle. In the case of the President, the fact that the aliens have incinerated 80% of the world's population isn't deemed sufficient to properly motivate him. Only after the First Lady dies as well is he really mad. In the bogus jargon of Christopher Vogler, the author of the current industry bible, *The Writer's Journey*, he has a "double wound."

This is the real problem with the films coming out of Hollywood today: the characters are designed rather than created. Studio executives have a psychological blueprint that specifies exactly what array of traits the different characters in a story should have and screenplays are accepted or rejected according to whether they conform to that model. The pervasiveness of this blueprint reflects the influence of screenwriting gurus like Vogler, who endlessly regurgitate Joseph Campbell's *Hero of a Thousand Faces*. Film makers are content to embrace this conceptual framework in large part because, with a few exceptions, their only acquaintance with the world of ideas is during weekly sessions with their therapists.

The reason Hollywood executives pay such scant attention to plots is because they are so completely focused on these crude, supposedly universal psychological principles. The real holes in this summer's crop of blockbusters were those which should have been filled by fully-developed, individual human characters—heroes with a human face, rather than a thousand.

Biologist "Bottles" Sex-Appeal

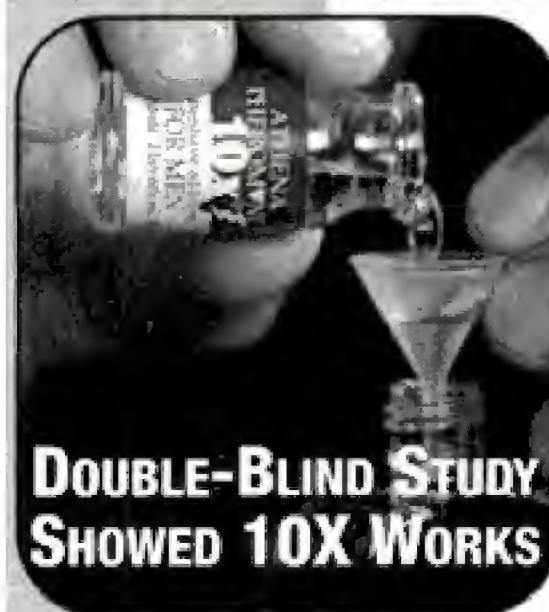
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the *WASHINGTON POST* newspaper (11/18/86).

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ANGEL, SAINT, OR MALE OPPORTUNIST IN DRAG?

THE TRUTH ABOUT MOTHER TERESA. BY WILL SELF

To the world she was Mother Teresa of Calcutta, an Albanian nun whose selfless dedication to the abandoned of society—the lepers, the poor, the dying—earned her worldwide love, respect, and, in 1979, the Nobel Peace Prize. But to me she will always be Terry Cohen, a huckster, a pimp, a four-flusher, but one of the most joyful and inspiring men I have ever known.

I mourn his passing. Not only that but I feel that if only we could appreciate some of the lessons to be learned from Terry's extraordinary life—and example—then we would be in far better shape to face the moral smack-in-the-chops the millennium looks like it will deliver.

Now the time has come to tell Terry's story. I always knew it would happen. The last time I visited Terry at the Missionaries of Charity compound on Bhow Road in Calcutta, I found him gripped by a typical bout of ill-temper. "Jesus Christ!" he exclaimed, when at last we had negotiated the courtyards and halls of the mission, each one carpeted with the mean pallets on which lay the dying, and gained the sanctuary of his office. "You think it's any joke at my age, having to walk round all those pallets? No way. The phone rings, there's a delivery, a fax even—and off I go, tiptoe through the dying. Jesus, Will, it grinds you down."

"Terry," I said, producing a bottle of Old Incontinent from beneath my plain, white sari with the blue band, "take a fuggin' load off man." He got the office glasses out of his desk and I poured us both a generous four fingers. "Man!" He smacked his lips after taking a slug. "That's good rye. It's hell to get the stuff here—and anyways I don't like the

Sisters to see me off onna toot—gives them bad ideas."

"Terry," I abjured him, "What's up?"

"Will, I gotta tell you, man, my *time* is what's up. That's it—I'm done with caring

for the sick and dying with abject selflessness. I've managed to put a little stash together and as soon as I've figured out the mechanics of faking my own death, I'm outta here. In the old days I'd think nuttin' of cradling five, ten, maybe twenty lepers in my arms—and that was just a long morning! But now... well. Sometimes the sight of someone with a bad hangnail can drag me down for a whole day." Terry took another pull on the rye, and without asking filled his glass.

He was unwinding somewhat and had hitched up the bottom of his sari to reveal tightly laced, two-tone shoes, socks with outsize clocks on them, and a pair of plaid-patterned suspenders that emphasized how thick and curly his ankle hair was.

"But where will you go Terry?" I asked, "Where will you be able to find peace, knowing there is still God's work to be done?"

"I'll tell you where: Las Vegas!" He took a somewhat frayed White Owl from a pouch dangling round his neck, and lit it with a kitchen match that he struck on the side of his crucifix. "I've put a down payment on a great little condo, and I've got a couple of insurance policies I can cash in," he said as he puffed the stogie expansively. "I'm not saying I'm gonna be rich, but I'll have enough dough to get into the Circus Circus twice a week, drop a few C-notes, ogle those shikse with the big titties." How full of vitality the man was.

"Yeah," he continued, "I haven't felt like this since I heard the call-within-a-call, all those years ago, in 1946, on the train to Darjeeling." I didn't want to sound so sycophantic, but if he was telling the truth about leaving Calcutta, I had to know the facts about this most crucial incident in Terry's life. "What was the call?"

"I remember it distinctly: 'Stop! Or



LISA LORRAINE LAICO

we'll shoot!' I'd been running a very successful little scam, bringing penicillin into British India. But then they cornered me on this train, in this compartment with this funny little Albanian nun. I said 'Gimme that sari, lady.' And she did."

"But what happened to the real Mother Teresa?" I asked, aghast. But Terry looked at me with perfect equanimity.

"I dunno. They court-marshalled her—shot her I guess. I never found out. But what I did find out was that I was responsible for setting up this fuggin' mission. I didn't have any choice. From then on it was wall-to-wall lepers. Kind of a fitted skin carpet."

I took a while to digest this. I had known of Terry's Jewish, male identity for some years, but he had never told me the full story of his conversion. I took a slug of the rye before saying, "But Terry, the Mission here, the leper colony, the Kalighat home for the dying; you really did do all of those good works; you really did receive the Nobel Prize; you really did cradle in your arms all those destitute, moribund, caste-less Indians—didn't you?"

"We-ell, let's just say I did enough—y'know what I mean? There was some cradling, some stroking. But I never lost my eye for the main chance. All of that international traveling? Good front. Fuggin' good front. You think they're gonna look under some old nun's sari when she goes through customs? No way. Very handy. A few diamonds this way—a bit of horse on the way back. Up to Kabul—down to Lahore—"

"You mean to say you were a smuggler?"

"Smuggler-shmuggler! It worked didn't it? The lepers got fed, the dead had somewhere to die. Gimme a break here already."

For the next half hour or so, before the runner came by to take his rigged bets for the State lottery, Mother Terry unpacked for me his deep storehouse of wisdom—wisdom garnered from many years of helping the disadvantaged through a successful, international smuggling operation. What he had to say was simple and austere; he was not a man of power and pomp, but a simple nun called to do the bidding of God.

Looking back on that time, I can't help but think: had Terry not taken that final taxi ride for which there is only one destination, then his pragmatic mixture of moral ideas might well have saved the world. Terry promoted ecumenicalism, inter-faith, and gender tolerance in the most sincere imaginable way: by becoming a Jewish, male nun.

He was a simple, holy man—we shall all miss him.

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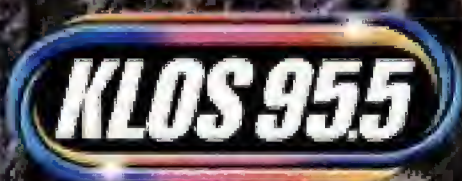
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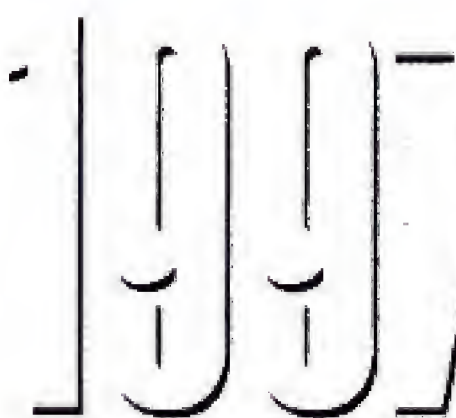
We'll see.

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From the cosmic misfortunes of the space-
station Mir #7, to President Clinton hurting
his knee #86 (and us having to hear about it
every time he crutched towards a helicopter),
one has to admit that 1997 was a slightly more
irritating year than usual. Civilized people

clutched their temples in agony as the media held its coping-session
with TV's Ellen being—and who didn't know?—and who, knowing,
cared?—a lesbian #1. Then there was the suddenly portly Stallone to
deal with. And the Promise Keepers. And even if none of these things
had happened, the mysterious plague of deformed frogs #71 wasn't
exactly reassuring. It's increasingly obvious that life can be as annoying
as televised figure skating. So why not face up to it?

A Note on Scoring:

Crikey, it must feel intense to whoosh
back and forth in the body of a four foot
nine inch Ukrainian orphan, as a great
cloud of tinny music fills the arena—
music without lyrics, of course, for oth-
erwise we should have an automatic
tenth-of-a-point deduction.

You have to know things like that
when you're a skater. It's not all about
looking good in a feathered silver leo-
tard. Though it is partly. You're going to
be judged according to rules every bit as
complex, cruel, and capricious as those
of life itself: points added for smiling,
deducted for violations of the Katarina
Rule prohibiting skimpy, provocative
clothing. Credit given for maximal cov-
erage of the ice surface, for Carriage and
Expression, for Grace. A foot wrong in
any category and you can forget that \$10
million in endorsements, and start lim-
bering up for decades as a novelty pros-
titute in a Kiev hotel lobby.

Coinciding as it does with the 1998

Winter Olympics from Nagano, Japan,
this eleventh SPY 100 has chosen to
rank the irritating events and people
and concepts of 1997 as skaters, accord-
ing to the strict rules of figure skating.
With one exception. Given that we re-
ward Badness and penalize Goodness,
violation of a skating rule can just as eas-
ily result in extra points as in deduc-
tions, depending on how the infraction
affects the overall Badness of the entry.
It's very complicated.

Furthermore, we have taken the
liberty of going "Under the Ice" with
several of our competitors, going back-
stage, following them home to Dad's
ruptured dairy farm, just to see what
makes them tick.

Just as a pop-fly to an already jubi-
lant center fielder seems to hang a little
longer when you know the batter had
to beat cancer even to put on his
helmet, we hope these up-close-and-
personal segments bring this year's spy
100 to life. Whoosh!



2. DIANARAMA

ELEMENTS: As driving's Henri Paul was falling through the revolving doors of the Paris Ritz, the *National Enquirer* had already gone to press with the headline "DI GOES SEX MAD." Within hours of her death, however, editor Steve Coz had nabbed the role of tabloid conscience—"There's a difference between observing celebrities [oh look, there's a celebrity] and hunting them down." British tabloids' requests to the Royal National Institute for the Deaf for lip-readers to eavesdrop on the royal family during Diana's funeral were declined. **MUSIC W/LYRICS:** Elton John's respectfully desyncopated version of "Candle in the Wind." **SPEED:** A more than respectable 122 mph. **DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:** Lowish. Would have been higher had there only been one pillar. In fact, there were many. **GRACE:** Plastic-haired Fayed family spokesman Michael Cole unable to get through sentence without recourse to French or Latin. **SCORE:** 5.95

bravely agreed. The Oakland school superintendent resigned, and the school board rewrote their policy. They stopped describing "Ebonics" as "genetically based" and gave up pushing for it as a second language. **UTILIZATION OF ICE:** Ebonicisms such as "diss," "phat," "you know what I'm saying," and "yo" continued to course through the general population, pushing archaic groovyisms like "monstro" and "what can I do you for?" to the brink of extinction. **SCORE:** 5.83

5. Nerd Ranches

ELEMENTS: Charles Simonyi of Microsoft has a \$12 million home that one may not enter without donning little black silk booties. It contains a putting green, black-lit video arcade, and a programmable bed that revolves to face a fireplace that lights automatically. The company's Paul Allen displaced a children's summer camp so he could have his own island. Mike Markula, former chairman of Apple, petitioned for a zoning exemption on the grounds that his massive new house would provide "affordable housing" for locals hired to work there. **HARMONIOUS WITH MUSIC:** Bill Gates finally moved into his frightening

1. TV'S ELLEN

ELEMENTS: The rumors of "Ellen's" sensitively handled coming-out episode were circulating for at least a year before it actually appeared. Coy, self-dramatizing scriptwriters referred to the coming-out episode with unflagging self-importance as the "Puppy" episode, after Disney—as Disney will, in between raking in profits and destroying Times Square—suggested Ellen decide to adopt a pet rather than an alternative lifestyle. Ellen admitted that she had come out so as to boost her show's ratings—but actually did appear, off screen, to be a lesbian, enjoying a strangely public relationship with actress Anne Heche.

TECHNICAL MERIT: After the coming-out episode, Ellen's TV-Q rating was an impressive -49, tying her with former celebrity Robin Givens for "the least likeable woman in prime time."

VARIATION OF SPEED: Interestingly, the temporarily extremely famous DeGeneres is the first lesbian relationship for up-and-coming actress Ann Heche.

MEANINGLESS WAVING OF ARMS: DeGeneres—always more affable than what you might call funny, both before and after she started pretending to be Lucille Ball—joked for the media-age equivalent of the Cretaceous Era that she was "Le...banese" and that a character named "Les Bian" would be joining the show.

SCORE: 6

3. Blind People Hunting

ELEMENTS: Michigan became the 16th state to legalize hunting for the blind. A blind hunter must be accompanied and assisted by a sighted person of at least 18 years of age, possessing a hunting license or proof of successful completion of a Hunter Safety class. The blind hunter must possess proof of blindness in the form of a State ID card. Thomas Schermer, 52, of Michigan said, "I might not be able to see the deer"—or anything else—"but I'll guarantee you that in those last seconds before I shoot, my pulse will be as high as in the days when I could!" **DIFFICULTY:** Blind people hunting is just plain wrong.

SCORE: 5.91

4. Ebonics

ELEMENTS: The Oakland School Board declared that many of its 28,000 black students did not speak standard English, but a distinctive language called "Ebonics" ("ebony" and "phonics"). "The goal is to give African-American students the ability to have standard English proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking," said a spokeswoman for the Oakland schools. "To do that, we are recognizing that many students bring to the classroom a different language, Ebonics." Very few people thought this was a great idea—Jesse Jackson said, "I understand their attempt to reach out to those children, but this is an unacceptable surrender borderlining on disgrace." The nation

6. MALE NAIL POLISH



ELEMENTS: Macho colors include: Cowboy (gold), Dog (purplish-green, like a bruise), Oedipus (forest green), Sex Pistol (dark silver), Testosterone (silvery-grey), Mildew (medium green). Favored by tiredly outrageous pop stars like Steven Tyler and Lenny Kravitz, the trend is apparently a reflection of Society's changing perspective. Strangely, wearers hands resemble those of women. **COVERAGE OF ICE SURFACE:** Poor. Admits Hard Candy co-owner Dineh Mohajer, "I'm not seeing it in Utah and Wyoming." **SCORE:** 5.51

dream lodgings: guests will wear programmed pins that inform the house of their taste in music and media.

SCORE: 5.63

7. Orbiting Deathtrap

ELEMENTS: In February, antiquated Russian space-station Mir caught fire. In June, it collided with a supply vessel. The astronauts went on a space walk to repair the resulting holes, but could not find any. Then a computer failed; the station spun temporarily out of control; the oxygen systems broke down; there was a power-failure; the atmosphere purifier overheated; and an astronaut accidentally disconnected a vital power cable. "Why do these malfunctions happen?" asked Mission Control's Vladimir Solovyov. "Do you know why your car breaks down?"

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Increased levels of carbon dioxide made it "harder to think, easier to make mistakes," said U.S. astronaut Shannon Lucid.

KATARINA RULE: Mir commander Tsibliyev's zero-gravity, unicornish spume of hair resonated nicely with reports of his creeping insanity.

SCORE: 5.43

8. El Niño

ELEMENTS: Periodically, the Pacific Ocean warms by a few degrees and then there's hell to pay globally. Scientists have been predicting crop failures and meteorological chaos. In the happy dictatorship of North Korea, the worst affected so far, El Niño meant that two years of food shortages would be followed by a prolonged drought.

UTILIZATION OF ICE: El Niño looks set to accelerate melting of polar ice caps, thereby flooding the planet.

SCORE: 5.36

9. Heaven's Gate

ELEMENTS: Thirty-nine maniacs in matching black track suits and Nike walking shoes ate a lethal dose of barbiturates mixed with applesauce, drank a shot of vodka, covered their heads with trash bags and purple shrouds, and died in a rented villa, which they had nicknamed "The Craft." Their intention was to hitch a ride on an alien spacecraft thought by cult-leader Marshall "Herff" Applewhite to be trailing the Hale-Bopp Comet. The group referred to death as "leaving your vehicle." Each was found with at least one \$5 bill and a handful of quarters on their person. Cult leaders, notorious longtime loons Marshall

Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles, his platonic wife, variously referred to themselves as "The Two" and "Bo and Peep," and theorized that heterosexuals were less evolved than homosexuals, who had at least overcome the attraction to women. Applewhite had castrated himself, and urged others to join him. Having private thoughts, having likes or dislikes, eating between "experiments" (meals) and using the "I" or "me" pronoun were all considered grievous of-

10. JONBENET RAMSEY



ELEMENTS: John Bennett Ramsey, JonBenet's nouveau-riche dad, insisted that his daughter's name be pronounced with a French accent. She died from severe head trauma and had been sexually abused. A practice ransom note was found in the family's house. The note itself began with the unlikely assertion, "We are a group of individuals that represent a small foreign faction" and moved quickly into Artaudian surrealism with phrases such as "Don't try to grow a brain, John" and "If we catch you talking to a stray dog, she dies." In the middle of the investigation, Chief of Police Tom Koby left for a vacation. Ramsey attorney Lee Foreman was seen giving backrub to DA's assistant Trip DeMuth during one of Patsy Ramsey's well-catered handwriting demonstrations.

UTILIZATION OF ICE SURFACE: In the hours before the police arrived, "distraught" Ramseys did a spectacular job of mussing, smearing, all but picknicking upon the whole crime scene.

KATARINA RULE: Oh yeah.

SCORE: 5.21

fenses. Nimrod cult members killed time debating whether Kirk or Picard was a better captain of the Enterprise. The ancient, bald Shakesperian—of whom Applewhite was an effeminate dead-ringer—triumphed every time.

TECHNICAL MERIT: Prior to suicide, Applewhite purchased a LX200 Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope for \$3,645, and then returned it after failing to locate his precious spaceship.

MUSIC WITH LYRICS: "Herff" had been show-tune guru at the University of St. Thomas. Automatic penalty.

SCORE: 5.31

11. Swiss Cheats

ELEMENTS: In May, the U.S. Government accused Swiss banks of hiding the origins of money, gold, and paintings they'd received during WWII, a conflict in which the clock-making weenies were famously unable to pick a side. The Swiss were also charged with systematically hampering Holocaust survivors trying to recover their assets. A guard at the Union Bank of Switzerland was fired after disclosing that his company was preparing to shred old ledgers. The Honorary President of the Union Bank, Robert Holzach, told the New Yorker that Jews are excluded from top posts in most Swiss banks.

ORIGINALITY: Low. Holzach went on to say that he suspected, of all things, a Jewish conspiracy behind the Swiss difficulties.

MEANINGLESS WAVING OF ARMS: Stuart Eizenstat, the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, said that the very *hint* of imposing penalties on Swiss firms "creates an atmosphere of Swiss-bashing that is not justified."

SCORE: 5.17

12. Crazy Memoir Ladies

ELEMENTS: *The Kiss*, written by Kathryn Harrison, about an affair she had with her father when she was 20 years old, prompted an identically icky essay by her husband, Colin Harrison, in *Vogue*. *Close to the Bone*, a collection of "memoirs of hurt, rage, and desire" edited by Laurie Stone, "posits personal writing as a species of peep-show performance." Stone, who will herself do anything for a quarter, was a C-Section baby, had a controversial potty training ("My shitting remained a bone of contention"), and presently owns a dog whose bowel-movements are definitely no laughing matter.

VARIETY: *Angela's Ashes*, a fall-into-peat-bog-while-running-home-to-Mam reminiscence by God's own professional



13. LOSING TV'S MARV ALBERT

ELEMENTS: The World's Greatest Transvestite Sports Announcer, 54, accused by 42-year-old woman of biting her and forcing her to perform oral sex in a Virginia hotel room. During trial, witnesses testified to Albert's love of women's underwear and to his homosexual urges.

GRACE: Situation made more degrading by bad jokes from wags, professional and otherwise, e.g. "Yessss! [Albert's trademark] I'm Marv Albert and er... I like panties."

SCORE: 5.07

Irishman, Frank McCourt.

SCORE: 5.13

14. The Gay Assassin

ELEMENTS: The murders of five men—among them designer Gianni Versace—in three months by a gay genius party-boy from San Diego had TV experts falling over themselves to point out that Cunanan was not a serial killer, but a "spree" killer. One of Versace's bitchy friends insisted that Cunanan never stepped foot in Versace's villa prior to the murder because, "[Cunanan was] a five out of ten... And you can find tens all over South Beach." Federal agents suspected Cunanan was in Florida weeks before Versace was murdered, but did not inform the local police or media.

CARRIAGE AND STYLE: A Moriarty among gay "spree" killers, the lamming Cunanan kept a high profile as only a criminal genius can. Eight days before killing Versace, he sold one of ten gold coins he had stolen from his Chicago victim, Lee Miglin, signing his own name for the transaction and leaving a clean thumb print. Cunanan was then spotted at a Miami Subs Grill cavalierly ordering a Tuna Sub Combo. Combo was bagged and ready before the police arrived and Cunanan escaped. Rumors abounded that the gay-sex-enjoying brainiac was swanning around Miami dressed as a woman. Somebody even claimed to have spotted Cunanan dressed as a policeman, lurking in the rear of a Versace-murder press conference.

GRACE: In the end, Cunanan disappointed everyone by shooting himself in the mouth in a tacky houseboat instead of escaping to Cuba in a submersible "supercar," as reports of his genius-level IQ had led police and public to expect.

SCORE: 5.01

15. "Spinning"

ELEMENTS: This low-impact, super-intense cardiovascular biking exercise was

born in Chicago a mere two years ago. This year, 23.2 million will take spinning classes. Bikes cost more than a thousand dollars each. Instructors take you on an imaginary bike ride, yelling above pounding music: "It's a nice day out! Wave to the man on the corner! Now we're going up a hill!"

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Varies. Adjustable via easily reachable knob on the fuselage.

SCORE: 4.96

16. THE X-FILE PUN FILE



ELEMENTS: "The Ex-Files," *Texas Monthly*; "The Next Files," *The Daily Record*; "The Sex Files," *Sunday Mail*; "The Sex-Files: Aliens on Broadway," *New York Times News Service*; "The Rex Files," *Scottish Daily Record*, on dinosaurs; "The New Mex Files," *Texas Monthly*; "The Why Files," *Spy Magazine*

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Not as easy as it looks. Oh okay fine. None.

SCORE: 4.92

17. Esquire

ELEMENTS: Published an article with the worst opening sentence in history, "This is the 999999s, as in dressed to, and most people are." Most of staff fired mere days before

publication of SPY article saying they were all about to be fired. Tom Junod wrote an actively duplicitous cover story for the October issue, about Kevin Spacey. Entitled "Kevin Spacey Has a Secret," it appears to confirm the rumor that Spacey is gay: "He came out of the closet last spring..." But it turns out that clever Junod was writing about the gay character Spacey played in the film *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. Spacey's actual big secret was "that he is a movie star." *Esquire* followed up its

Spacey story with a patronizing and gratuitous cover-story, "Three Ways of Thinking About Christy Turlington," in which the godlike New York University student was depicted as a ultranaive, self-conscious icon with a balding boyfriend.

KATARINA RULE: Emphatically former Editorial Director Randall Rothenberg may or may not dress like lounge smoothie.

SCORE: 4.89

18. Teenage Sprogdropping

ELEMENTS: Nationwide spate of spontaneous child-delivery and child-disposal by teenage mothers concentrated, meaninglessly, in New Jersey and among girls named Melissa. Melissa Seaner, 17, secretly gave birth in Ventnor, N.J., then returned home, where her baby was found three days later in a gym bag in her garage. In Medina County, Ohio, a 17-year-old girl allegedly wrapped her newborn baby in two plastic bags, leaving it to die in her basement. 18-year-old Melissa Drexler was charged with suffocating her 6-pound, 6-ounce baby after giving birth in the bathroom at her high school prom.

ORIGINALITY: Drexler cut her child's umbilical cord on the edge of a sanitary-napkin dispenser.

SUITABILITY OF MUSIC: Drexler returned to her prom after giving birth, ate a salad, and requested Metallica's "Unforgiven" from the deejay.

SCORE: 4.84

19. "Puff Daddy"

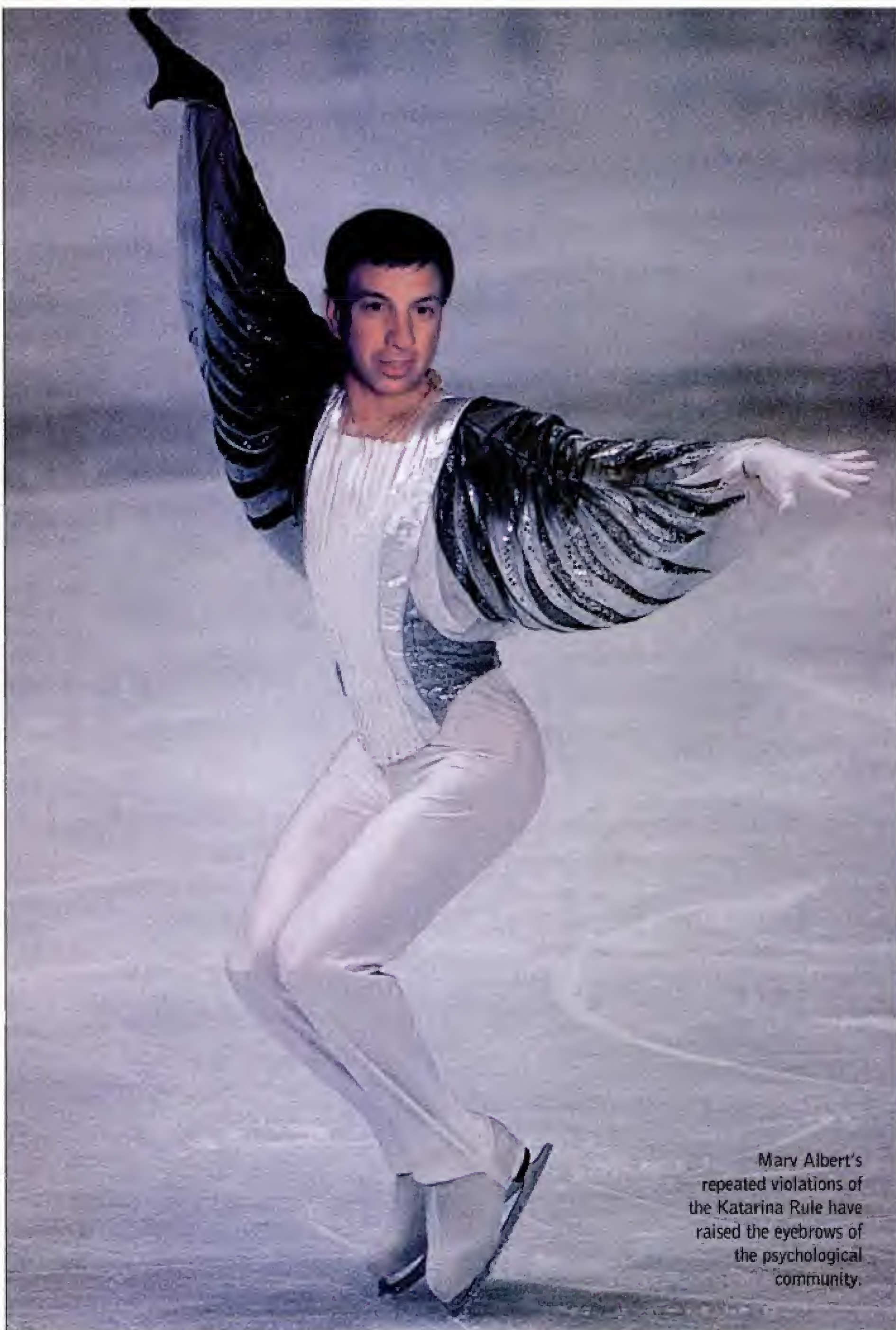
ELEMENTS: The 26-year-old rap-producer and president of Bad Boy Entertainment, Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs, divided the year between commercial expressions of grief for late friend and cash cow Christopher "Notorious B.I.G." Wallace and the senseless promotion of tuneless, ball-bearing-eyed rapper Mase.



20. The Kennedys

FADE IN: *The Kennedys, entering a chapel. It crosses itself, and enters a pew. Closer, now, we see that it is praying.* Tesh: "The

Hydra-headed veteran from Hyannisport has had a rough time of it off the ice this year, burning its arm in a fireworks accident, confessing to alcoholism and money woes, fighting with its wife on an airplane, grappling with a frightening weight problem, and barely escaping charges of statutory rape. The Massachusetts skater seemed at times to indeed be embarked on its final, as it were, *spiral de morte*. But the Kennedys may still have what it takes." *The Kennedys throws itself into a stunning pirouette arabesque, followed by an almost perfect Hamill camel.* Tesh: "It's not like the old days when it would skip practice, have a few pops, drive off a bridge, and leave its passenger to drown. Those days are over. Public accountability is in. So, of course, is public confession. Other cultures—like the Boston Irish—might call what the Kennedys practice an unseemly airing of dirty laundry...but the Kennedys, better than any other skater, knows now that the media knows best." *The Kennedys, smiling terribly, flutzes an attempted Lutz, and then Midoris, flying disastrously, but with open arms, into the camera pits. The crowd is on its feet, applauding, with tears in its eyes.*



Mary Albert's repeated violations of the Katarina Rule have raised the eyebrows of the psychological community.

DID YOU KNOW?

Scott Hamilton, the five-foot-three-and-a-half-inch skater, resisted wearing makeup, in an effort to change the sport's sissy image. After years in the sport, however, Hamilton now uses brown eye shadow to mask his bald spot.

Law of the Rink

MEANINGLESS WAVING OF ARMS

In international competition, judges penalize any skater guilty of lavish and gaudy arm-movements intended to distract critics from the boring and easy motion of his or her feet—from the, well, skating.

At the end of the day, ice-skating is a sport, not a dance, and Judges are aware that it is in the highly-charged relationship between the skater and the unforgiving surface of the ice that true genius announces its arrival.



CARRIAGE AND STYLE: Video trademarks include: defiant stare into camera while displaying Rolex; high-speed speedboat-to-jetski-to-convertible chases with unidentified pursuers.

MEANINGLESS WAVING OF ARMS: Yes, both Puffy and Mace dance like retards.

SCORE: 4.81

21. The 80s Revival

ELEMENTS: Izod boutiques have returned, Duran Duran is touring again, and Donald Trump is once again erecting things in New York City's empty spaces. Poison's *Greatest Hits 1986-1996* was released. *Dirty Dancing* was rereleased. Motley Crüe came out with an album: *Generation Swine* which nearly counts as an *X-File Pun*. The Whitney museum staged a major retrospective for the world's greatest artist (calendar and memo-pad division) Keith Haring.

KATARINA RULE: Women are using purple and blue eyeshadow again. Their fingernails are once more pointy and claw-like. No sign yet of "big" hair or Jay McInerney, though.

SCORE: 4.76

22. Personal Home Pages

ELEMENTS: "That's cool... I have a web site I'm working on": Charlie Manson in April, reacting to a parole denial. North Korea now has its own website, www.kcna.co.jp. Highlights include: a report on "heroes who set fire to themselves" in protest of "fascist repression of workers." Saddam Hussein got a page for his birth-day—<http://196.27.0.22/iraq>—containing his life story in Arabic and a list of allied Gulf war atrocities (no ranking of favorite R.E.M. albums). Islamic Gateway, site, www.ummah.org.uk/, aims "to put the 'fun' back in fundamentalism."

SPEED: If you send Saddam Hussein an e-mail, courtesy of his spanking new website, it will have to be driven to Baghdad on an old, worn-out road from the nearest internet server, 500 miles away in Jordan.

SCORE: 4.71

23. Vampirella

ELEMENTS: Newspaper readers in New Orleans were bombarded with full page ads headed "From Anne Rice, A Private Citizen" outlining the vampire-cheese queen's views on politics (pro-Clinton) and real estate (pro-herself, anti-everyone else). Her prime target this year was a St. Charles

Street restaurant that Rice considers a "monstrosity." When her attacks did not cause the restaurateur to alter his "ludicrous and egregious" building, Rice placed an ad in the voice of Lestat, her number one fictional vampire. "Nothing short of your indescribable restaurant could shock me out of my torpor...I am now myself again."



ELEMENTS: In June, the Air Force issued a report debunking the celebrated rumor that an alien spacecraft crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947. The 231-page report, entitled "The Roswell Report: Case Closed," maintained that the wreckage had been part of a secret project using balloon-borne instruments to monitor Soviet nuclear testing. According to Air Force Colonel John Haynes, sightings of alien corpses were actually of "anthropomorphic test dummies" that had fallen from the balloons. The report further suggested that witnesses had mistakenly conflated different events between 1947 and 1976. The 1956 crash of a KC-97G Air Force plane, in which 11 fliers were badly burned by fuel, accounted for the rumored autopsies of mangled, black, odorous bodies. A 1959 incident in which an aviator's head swelled after a ballooning accident had supplied the basis for alleged sightings of a bulbous-headed alien with slits for eyes.

ORIGINALITY: Using that old, the-alien-you-saw-in-1947-was-actually-a-guy-whose-head-accidentally-expanded-in-1959 defense? None.

SCORE: 4.61

KATARINA RULE: Lest anyone forget who she is, Rice dresses like vampire.

SCORE: 4.68

25. Hong Kong Gone

ELEMENTS: Hong Kong, a city of 6.3 million, was under British colonial rule for 154 years. It is now a Special Administrative

Region of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese are cutting back individual liberties, such as the freedom to stage protests and make political contributions. In 1996, 6,100 people were sentenced to death in China. According to Amnesty International, at least 4,367 of them were killed.

TECHNICAL MERIT: Hong Kong has foreign reserves of \$66 billion, a GDP per capita of \$25,300, a stock market capitalization of \$350 billion, and foreign trade of \$376 billion. It is the fifth largest banking center based on external banking transactions, the third most competitive economy, and the busiest container port in the world. Current privileges such as zero capital gains tax and a 16.5% corporate tax rate, will be "reviewed." Ownership rights to property and stock will be gradually restricted.

MEANINGLESS WAVING OF ARMS: Yes. Chinese troops have been taught "friendly waves" to put former British subjects at ease while they undergo agonizing process of "sinocization."

SCORE: 4.56

26. Fat Stallone

ELEMENTS: Stallone put on 40 pounds to portray a hard-of-hearing small-town policeman in *Cop Land* and was roundly acclaimed as a reborn genius for the two weeks preceding the stunningly bad film's release. Stallone strangely described the experience of making the movie and gaining the weight as "a cleansing and a purging." The weight was gained with the aid of the Canadian Pancake House in Manhattan. "You begin to feel what it's like to walk into a room and not make waves," said Stallone. "You are just a man, who has to rely on his intelligence or affability for people to like him."

VARIATION OF SPEED: Stallone's next project is *Rambo 4*, in which he will sveltly battle right-wing militias.

SCORE: 4.51

27. John Denver

ELEMENTS: Observers of the unlicensed pilot's fatal crash into Monterey Bay say that the singer evidently tried to roll his home-built Burt Rutan two-seater, before there was a sharp pop, a puff of smoke, and the experimental plane plummeted 500 feet into the Pacific. Small planes with sober, licensed pilots flew over the graveside ceremony, and Denver's last recorded song, "Yellowstone (Coming Home)," was played for the likes of the devastated Goldie Hawn.

CHEESEHEADS

28.



ELEMENTS: Scofield Souvenir Inc., makers of the distinctively self-deprecating "Cheese Tops" hat favored by fans of the NFL champion Green Bay Packers, won a legal copyright tussle with the makers of the "Cheesehead" hat. But then, in a stunning development, Blowhard Industries Inc. of Milwaukee, the maker of an inflatable head-wedge called the "Cheese Hat," filed a lawsuit in federal court accusing Scofield of stealing *its* design. Both cases progressed despite bombshell revelation from public gallery that cheese is a food, not a hat.

COVERAGE OF ICE SURFACE: Naked-feeling fans can also buy Cheesehead cologne, earrings and cufflinks in the shape of cheese wedges, and a "Cheeseheads With Attitude" compact disc. Blood-alcohol levels may be further massaged with Cheesehead Beer.

SCORE: 4.39

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: It's hard to do rolls in the Burt Rutan Long-EZ, because it is not designed to do rolls.

SCORE: 4.46

29. Sex and the Military

ELEMENTS: In mid-May, Lt. Kelly Flinn, 26, the first-ever female bomber pilot, opted for a general discharge rather than undergo a court-martial for lying, disobeying an order, and adultery. Kim Messer and Jeanie Mentavlos, two of the four women at the Citadel Military Academy in South Carolina, claimed that men in boxer shorts had attacked them, and that others had set fire to their clothes and washed their mouths out with chemical "cleanser." Gene C. McKinney, Sergeant Major of the Army, was hit with 18 charges of sexual misconduct following Major Brenda L. Hoster's accusation that he kissed her in a Hawaii hotel. Sgt. Delmar Gaither Simpson, a drill in-

structor at the Aberdeen, Maryland, Proving Ground, was convicted of sexually harassing a number of female soldiers. One woman claimed he had infiltrated her sweatpants in a stairwell. He faces life in prison.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Low. One 23 year-old woman, whom Sgt. Simpson was convicted of raping 8 times, replied "I guess" when he asked if he could touch her.

SCORE: 4.33

30. Mergers

ELEMENTS: 1997 set a record for the most mergers (2000) in the least time (3 months), hastening the day when the entire world sits in the palm of a single cackling maniac with a weakness for loose clothing and tropical fish. Coopers & Lybrand and Price Waterhouse announced their intention to become the largest firm in the world with \$11,823,000,000 in revenue. Bell Atlantic merged with Nynex; Grand Metropolitan with Guinness; Dean Witter with Morgan Stanley; Cineplex Odeon and Sony Retail Entertainment are still working out the fine print.

POWER: The Cineplex/Sony merger, according to public advocate Mark Green, reduces to "within five years" the time it will take before we are forced to fork over \$15 just to see the re-re-release of the *Stars Wars* trilogy.

SCORE: 4.37

31. Racism

ELEMENTS: American Airlines apologized for one of its training manuals, which warned pilots about the tendency of Latin American passengers to call in bomb threats if they think they might miss a plane, and, once on board, to get drunk. Black women in a Sloan-Kettering breast cancer study were asked to agree or disagree with statements such as "I eat chitlins once in a while." Rep. Helen Chenoweth (R-Idaho) declared that the Forest Service is wasting its time recruiting blacks and Hispanics to work in her state: "The warm-climate community just hasn't found the colder climate that attractive." Organizers of Nashville's Swan Ball congratulated themselves for having managed to find a record 30 blacks willing to attend a party roster of 900. Said one of the elite, "They called me and asked me how I'd feel about a person of color being at my table, and I said it would be wonderful." A company called Discovery Tours circulated a brochure to New York City tourists offering the opportunity to "explore gang territories" and see "graffiti messages" in East Harlem.

ORIGINALITY: A female member of the National Association for the Advancement of White People was turned away from a Ku Klux Klan march for being black. Said a local Grand Dragon: "She wanted to stay at my house [for the weekend of the rally]. She's all confused, man. I don't think she knows she's a black."

SCORE: 4.31

TIGER WOODS

32.



ELEMENTS: Just as people were getting into the idea of a superstar black golfer, Woods loudly announced that he is, in fact, "Cablinasian," a term reflecting his caucasian, black, American Indian, and Asian backgrounds. Not that this stopped him from hauling Fuzzy Zoeller over the coals after that equally strange-named linksman made a low-grade wisecrack about Tiger's eating fried chicken. Tiger's smug father Earl Woods—though the two famously call each other "Sam"—remarked: "Tiger will do more than any other man in history to change the course of humanity." Tiger, for his part, remarked while rubbing the tips of his shoes together, "What's this?...It's a black guy taking off his condom" and then told a joke in which Buckwheat from *The*

Little Rascals somewhat misguidedly tries to demonstrate proper usage of the word "dictate" by means of the sentence, "Hey, Darla, how's my dick ta'te?"

SPEED: Before his first pro victory, Nike had guaranteed Tiger more than \$60 million.

WAVING OF ARMS: Tiger executed the first "raise-the-roof" gesture in Masters history.

SCORE: 4.25



34. The 2000/2001 Debate

FADE IN: *Slow pan, left-to-right across a row of giant stone numbers. They are on the moon or somewhere. The first number is a two.* Tesh: "For a skater, the road to the SPY 100 often begins a long way from the glare of the rink. And for some...from a place even further away than that. [The second giant stone number creeps into view. It is a zero] In the sixth century of this millennium, a chronologist—a *timekeeper*, if you will—named Dionysius Exiguus [cut to: man with glasses and smock moving bead on abacus, then scratching head] decided to mark the passing of the years as if the year 1 A.D. directly followed 1 B.C. The third number is also a zero. Sounds simple. It's not. For, with his simple calculation, Dionysius ignited a controversy that would in time become so well-chewed and annoying that it could, should it keep the favor of the judges, place in the upper reaches of the SPY 100 every single year. We...*know* there is a millennium coming up soon. But...when? Camera reveals a fourth giant stone number. but it is **CLOAKED IN SHADOW!** January 1st of the year 2000 as most people think? *Light starts to go up on the fourth number. It seems to be a zero* Or, as scientists claim *light floods the figure. It is a one!*, on January 1st of the year 2001? Only time, as they say, will tell."

Windsor and Fayed would later blame their catastrophic double waxel on a sudden barrage of flash photography from a smitten public.



Law of the Rink

MUSIC WITH LYRICS

Judges are required to penalize any skater who performs to music with lyrics. Lyrics are considered a distraction from the actual routine, though the obvious purpose of the rule is to spare the world-wide audience the spectacle of a short-skirted Balkan teen getting all flushed and emotive to the strains of whichever now disbanded eighties hair-metal band she and her friends are just getting into.



Some top ice-skating judges go their entire lives without ever awarding a perfect 6 score to a skater. Judges liken the first 6 to losing their virginities!

DID YOU KNOW?

33. Sightings Of The Virgin, Others

ELEMENTS: In April, the Virgin Mary was spotted on a roadside sign in Sunnyside, Washington. In June, her venues were a cluster of trees in Gradina, Croatia, and the floor of a Mexico City subway station. The words "Allah" and "Muhammad" appeared on a sliced potato while a woman in India was making lunch. After the Super Bowl, some Cheeseheads claimed they could see late coaching god Vince Lombardi wearing his trademark hat and overcoat in a newspaper photograph of the team's victory parade.

VARIETY: A disconsolate Brit wasted no time detecting the face of Princess Diana in a portrait of Charles II at St. James' Palace.

SCORE: 4.21



tried to take us." Sexy Spice Geri Halliwell has even become a pin-up girl for the nasty men in the Loyalist Volunteer Force wing of the Maze prison in Belfast, because of her Union Jack dress. **KATARINA RULE:** Spice Girl outfits, one of which came with "matching latex knickers and biker boots," induced spending hysteria among bidders at a Sept. 16 auction by Sotheby's at London's Hard Rock Cafe.

SCORE: 4.09

37. SPICE GIRLS

ELEMENTS: Since their formation by way of a 600-person casting call back in 1995, the Spice Girls have netted around \$300 million for their army of assorted handlers and sven-galis. Spice Girls fan Stacey Pennington saved herself and her brother from a kidnapper with a patented Mel C. (left) drop-kick. The six-year old said: "Sporty Spice is my favorite and I just copied what she does when the nasty man

35. Boring Spies

ELEMENTS: Un-Bondish Harold James Nicholson, former CIA station-chief in Romania, is the highest-ranking CIA employee to ever be caught spying. Gave Russians U.S. reports on Chechnya, as well as the identities and duties of other CIA case officers, including one in Moscow. He was sentenced to 24 years, in a plea-bargain that spared the agency a hugely invasive trial. Earl Edwin Pitts got 27 years on June 23 for his espionage; he was paid at least \$124,000 by the Russians. For \$65,000, he gave away the handset to a secure bureau phone, supplied personal and detailed info on two co-workers, including home addresses, and tried to smuggle a Russian technician into the FBI Academy.

CREATIVITY: Pathetically, Nicholson started spying in 1994 to pay a crippling first-time alimony payment of \$12,000, prior to a more manageable payment of \$650 per month.

UTILIZATION OF ICE In one instance, Pitts "outed" a whole class of CIA trainees to the Russians.

SCORE: 4.15

38. Bob Dylan

ELEMENTS: Always annoyingly profound, the frizzy haired master of gibberish took his depth to new depths this year by being hospitalized with a potentially fatal heart condition. News of Dylan's impending demise swept the planet, provoking manic hagiographies, and no more was really heard from the man until the day, apparently completely recovered, he reappeared in Bologna,

Italy, sharing a bill with the Pope. Demonstrating flexibility, the pontiff told the crowd of more than 300,000 people that the spiritual answer to life is "blowing in the wind... The wind that is the breath and life of the Holy Spirit, the voice that calls and says 'Come!'"

VARIETY: "How many roads must a man walk down before he becomes a man?" asked the Pope jesuitically, "I answer you: One! There is only one road for man and it is Christ, who said I am the way and life."

SCORE: 4.04

39. Promise Keeping

ELEMENTS: Former University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney talked several hundred thousand men into standing around the Mall in Washington, D.C., holding hands with other guys while listening to speeches stating, "We see homosexuality as a sin...we need to love homosexuals, but, at the same time, the sin of homosexuality cannot be excused." Revelers tossed Bibles into the air and The Rally, entitled, "Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men," was meant to inspire Promise Keeper members to pledge to "build stronger marriages and families through love, protection, and Biblical values."

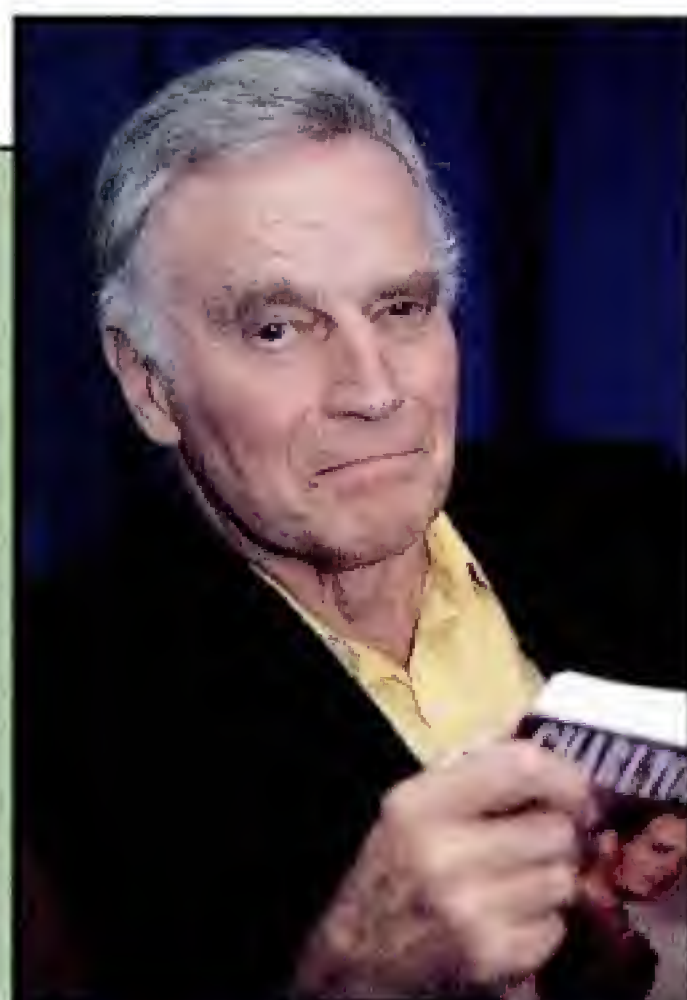
VARIATION OF SPEED: Several revelers wearing Promise Keeper buttons took a break from wife-honoring at a strip club called Joanna's 1819 Club. The men were said to have been generous tippers.

KATARINA RULE: Preponderance of "His Pain, Your Gain" T-shirts featuring bloodied Christ—evidently nailed to some sort of cross.

SCORE: 4.01

CHARLTON HESTON

36.



ELEMENTS: At 72, Charlton Heston, cinema's Moses, became Vice President of the NRA. He immediately criticized President Clinton's bid to have the triggers of all guns carry child safety locks and announced that "George Orwell's 1984 is closing in on us." Luckily, "[b]ecause of my public face, I can get into any congressman's or senator's office. The only price for that is I have to pose for photographs with their secretaries, which is fine with me." Heston believes the Second Amendment to the Constitution is the most vital one, what with "the doorway to all freedoms" being "framed with muskets" and all.

EXPRESSION AND ATTITUDE: Heston, who played Moses, Gordon of Khartoum, and the Omega Man, fears "the trigger-lock police, which will go from house to house...to check whether people are using...trigger-locks."

SCORE: 4.11



40. PLUNGER COPS

ELEMENTS: Abner Louima, a 30-year-old Haitian immigrant, was sodomized in police custody with a toilet-plunger handle, rupturing his bladder and piercing his colon on the morning of August 9. The attacker(s) then broke his teeth with the same implement. Officer Justin Volpe, 25, surrendered to internal affairs and was charged with aggravated sexual abuse and first degree assault. During and after the assault, the police allegedly taunted Louima: "That's your shit,

nigger," and "This is Giuliani time, not Dinkins time." Mayor Rudy Giuliani tried to spin the fact that some of Volpe's fellow officers had corroborated Louima's story as evidence the famous "blue wall of silence" that stops police squealing on each other did not actually exist. Unfortunately, other officers broke the wall to proclaim the "wall's" continued existence. **ORIGINALITY:** Protesters rather surreally seized upon the toilet-plunger as a symbol of police brutality. One bald activist at a rally was even observed with a moistened plunger suctioned to his pate.

SCORE: 3.95

41. Oprah's Book Club

ELEMENTS: Not actually a club, of course. More like a mysteriously edited list of books that spunky pudgeball Oprah Winfrey wants her talk-show viewers to buy. Every book featured has gone on to become a best-seller. When Toni Morrison's 20-year-old book *Song of Solomon* found its way onto the list, it instantly sold more copies than it had in the past nine years. Oprah's production company owns the film rights to the book. How influential is the book club? When Winfrey told fans to read *The Rapture of Canaan* by Sheri Reynolds, bonbon-inhaling viewers sent both Reynolds' book and an utterly unrelated title, *Out To Canaan* by Jan Karon, into the national top ten.

GRACE: At one point Winfrey claimed that she "couldn't have conversations with women who hadn't read *The Color Purple*."

SCORE: 3.88

42. Bill Maher

ELEMENTS: Having settled into his cushy job at a major network, Maher's claims to political incorrectness are even shakier and more embarrassing than they were before. In fact, it is not uncommon for him to scold guests ("C'mon, this is network!") who threaten to cross the line. Usually, though, Maher's shows are too boring and random for such rambunctious. One panel featured Deepak Chopra, Carrot Top, Nancy Friday, and Naomi Judd. He has appeared in such films as *D.C. Cab*, *Ratboy*, *Pizza Man* and *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death*.

ORIGINALITY: "Politically incorrect" was a cliché term even when he adopted the name.

CLEANNES OF MOVES: Maher admits to masturbating backstage before shows.

SCORE: 3.83

43. Old Rockers Arguing About Smoking Dope

ELEMENTS: Sir Paul McCartney, cherubic former band-pansy of the Beatles, nearly inverted the entire cosmology of Sixties Rock with his claims that he was responsible for introducing the ostensibly cooler Mick Jagger to marijuana in 1966. "How would he know?" asked Jagger sensibly, before going on to brag that he'd first smoked pot during the Stones' original U.S. jaunt in 1964.

MUSIC WITH LYRICS: McCartney claims that he himself was turned on to pot by Bob Dylan in 1964.

VARIATION OF SPEED: At least they've all stopped arguing about who had sex with Anita Pallenberg.

SCORE: 3.77

44. Netanyahu

ELEMENTS: Looks exactly like Steve Martin. Though taller than predecessor, he is angrier with Palestine liberation's Yasir Arafat.

ORIGINALITY: The Mossad, the Israeli secret service, surreptitiously poisoned Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal with a deadly nerve agent.

Poisoners were then returned to Israel in return for the poison's antidote.

SCORE: 3.71

45. Woolworths Nostalgia

ELEMENTS: Far worse than the closing, after 118 years, of the historic department chain was the resulting spasm of invariably stomach-churning reminiscence on the part of the nation's elderly. Nancy Rivera Brooks, a columnist for the *L.A. Times*, wrote, "Woolworths stores were a fixture on Main Street nationwide—the sort of place where one could buy a pet turtle and a hair net and then enjoy a grilled cheese sandwich and some cole slaw at the lunch counter." Helen Gurley Brown, a tangle of bone and hair that used to edit *Cosmopolitan*, on her favorite Woolworth's sandwich: "it was a very thin slice of ham, and they'd put it in this sandwich maker that would clamp closed, and then they'd grill it. The outside of the bread would be toasted, but the inside wouldn't be."

UTILIZATION OF ICE: Incomplete. Remote outposts of the grilled-turtle and cheese-hairnet franchise will persist in Germany and Mexico.

SCORE: 3.62

46. GEORGE CLOONEY



ELEMENTS: Mumbling George Clooney led the charge of hypocritical celebrities blaming the paparazzi for Princess Diana's death. Paparazzi responded by refusing to photograph Clooney at the premiere of his movie *The Peacemaker*. "They said they were going to do it and they did it" said Clooney.

ATTITUDE AND EXPRESSION: Clooney's outrage was understandable, as paparazzi snapped him watching strippers at *Scores*.

SCORE: No, *Scores*.

47. Old Men Quite Possibly Having Sex

ELEMENTS: On September 5, Larry King, 63, wed Shawn Southwick, 37, in an L.A. hospital room. It was King's 7th marriage. After the ceremony he was carted to N.Y. on a medevac plane, and three days later he had a two-balloon angioplasty. Roguish admitted wife-batterer Anthony Quinn, 82, left his ancient wife Iolanda, telling reporters he doesn't hit 35-year-old Kathy Benvin, his former secretary, because "she doesn't provoke me."

overdramatic re-enactments of trial scenes on the E! Channel. O.J. made nearly \$3 million, including \$1,013,900 for autographs and memorabilia during the trial.

KATARINA RULE: Offers to melt O.J.'s Heisman trophy on pay-per-view were difficult to take seriously because distractingly mustachioed Fred Goldman appeared to be wearing a disguise.

UTILIZATION OF ICE: Cunningly, perhaps in preparation for his ski-capped spasm of violence, O.J. had been spreading his wealth for years among his family members, minimizing his personal liability.

SCORE: 3.48

ELEMENTS: Real name Agnes Bojaxiu managed to stay alive for the best part of the year, expanding her global empire of poverty-perpetuating nunnery. In the words of Christopher Hitchens, Bojaxiu "furnished P.R.-type cover for all manner of cultists and shady business men," like Haitian dictator "Papa Doc" Duvalier and others. Bojaxiu regularly refused even basic equipment for her Indian hospitals, as her main goal was to provide her nuns with wretched dying people for them to tend to in picturesque ways that they might become holy. Her San Francisco home for the HIV-positive was famously depressing.

UTILIZATION OF ICE SURFACE:

After sending a letter to the acciden-

MOTHER TERESA

48.



tally ubiquitous judge Lance Ito, begging clemency for Charles Keating, now serving a 10-year jail sentence for his part in the Savings and Loan swindle, Keating gave Mother Teresa the use of his jet, and about \$1.25 million.

KATARINA RULE: Teresa regularly dressed up as nun.

SCORE: 3.57

EXPRESSION AND ATTITUDE: "I want to have another one right away!" said TV's nervous 77-year-old Tony Randall, the proud father of "Julia."

SCORE: 3.58

49. OJ II

ELEMENTS: Sixteen months after O.J.'s acquittal on criminal charges, a civil jury unanimously found Simpson "responsible" for two deaths. Though not required to pay a dime to Nicole Brown's Estate, O.J. was ordered to pay the family of Ron Goldman \$33.5 million in damages. When The Juice spoke up in his own defense, the uncannily Japanese Judge Hiroshi Fujisaki said the award was a reasonable price for Simpson's brutal act of waitricide. Because of the judge's draconian decision to exclude cameras from the courtroom, however, tormented would-be observers were forced to slaver over the workproduct of sketch-artists and/or to watch hysterically

50. The Bible Code

ELEMENTS: Before the murder of Israeli P.M. Yitzhak Rabin, mathematician Eli Rips warned him that the words "Yitzhak Rabin" and "assassin that will assassinate" were encoded in the Hebrew Bible such that they actually crossed each other. Quite reasonably, Rabin ignored the gibbering loon and sure enough ran afoul of an assassin who, as Rips had tongue-twisterishly predicted, did indeed assassinate him. Also predicted: WWII, Watergate, Winston Churchill, the assassination of both Kennedys, Bill Clinton, the Holocaust, Hiroshima, the moon landing, "scuds," and the death of Diana. On meeting Rips, author Michael Drosnin, who went on to turn Rips' theory into a book: "But who knew 3,000 years ago that there would be a Gulf war, let alone a missile [that] would be fired on January 18?" Drosnin asked. "God," Rips replied, predictably.

VARIETY: Mathematically unlimited.

Harold Gans, a retired cryptologist with the National Security Agency says, "You can find 'Drosnin is the messiah,'" in the Bible, as well as almost anything else.

SCORE: 3.44

51. Film Nazis

ELEMENTS: *The English Patient*, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture, made a romantic lead out of Laszlo Almasi, a desert explorer who spied for the Germans during World War II. The movie made \$225 million, Miramax Films' largest gross to date. In *Seven Years in Tibet*, white-toothed Brad Pitt plays Heinrich Harrar, this time an Austrian Nazi who was a tutor to the Dalai Lama.

VARIETY: *The English Patient* portrayed Laszlo Almasi as a heterosexual who collaborated with the Nazis only so he could be reunited with his female lover. In reality, Almasi was Rommel's gay lover and would have spied for anyone with a riding crop.

SCORE: 3.36

52. The Sinister Torch

ELEMENTS: Young Malcolm Shabazz, 12, grandson of Malcolm X—a "schizophrenic boy of a paranoid type"—acted on the advice of a pyromaniac imaginary friend called Sinister Torch when he used an accelerant to set fire to his grandmother's home. The arson was evidently an attempt to be returned to his sometime drug-addicted mother, Qubilah Shabazz. His gran caught fire battling the blaze, and died of her injuries. Shabazz has been placed with six other juvenile pyrophiles at Hillcrest Educational Center in Lenox, MA.

ORIGINALITY: "Sinister Torch" would be worth more money as a cartoon character if he/she weren't an incarcerated gran-killer.

SCORE: 3.29

53. Donald Trump

ELEMENTS: Flyaway-haired mogul and author Donald Trump, never particularly long in the finger, is divorcing in public again, this time from rubbery Marla Maples. A pre-nuptial agreement gives Maples \$2.5 million and an undisclosed amount for their daughter, Tiffany, 3. In the *New Yorker*, Donald "all but confirmed" that he was bailing on the marriage before a clause in the pre-nup kicked over giving Marla significantly more cash in the inevitable event of a split. "We're talking about very huge things. The numbers are much bigger than people understand." When Trump visited a New York public

school, he offered to buy the children sneakers. A student asked, "Why did you offer us sneakers if you could give us scholarships?" Sneakers obviously cheaper.

CARRIAGE AND STYLE: The ever-tasteful Donald's daughter Ivanka, 15, was a surprise choice to co-host the Miss Teen USA pageant, to which Trump's company owns the TV rights. Millions watched her bomb.

GRACE: Donald on Ivanka: "She has these rockers calling her up and asking for dates. Top names. Won't tell you who. And there is zero chance they are going to be dating her. That's taken care of."

ORIGINALITY: Trump is still referred to as "The Donald" by lifeless eighties dinosaurs. ("Donald Mayonnaise" much hipper, edgier.)

SCORE: 3.27

54. Weird Martinis

ELEMENTS: Poncy, lethal drinks. "The foo-foo martinis are taking the place of shooters," explains Chuck Sass, food and beverage manager for the Mahi Mah restaurant in Virginia Beach. "We use liquor from pickled okra instead of vermouth," he says. And we garnish it with okra. The cayenne in the pickling liquid gives it a pepper vodka taste. It's really a strange combination, but people drink it. I don't understand it." People also cram olives with a range of stuffings: almonds, anchovies, habaneros, jalapenos, capers.

MUSIC WITH LYRICS: Signifying that the fad has already been dead for seasons without measure, Pottery Barn released a CD called *Martini Lounge*. Capitol Records has a total of 12 vermouth-eschewing compilations released this year alone.

SCORE: 3.18

55. Deaf Mexicans

ELEMENTS: Police were hampered by their limited knowledge of Spanish sign language, but they managed to indict two deaf Mexicans on charges of forcing other deaf Mexican immigrants to sell trinkets for virtually no wages. Prosecutors say Mexicans were tortured with electric shocks, had their heads slammed into walls, and were chained to beds. Police found 44 DMs living in a four-bedroom apartment and eighteen in a separate two-bedroom apartment. Twenty people have been indicted. Prosecutors think the ring was run by an extended clan of deaf people from Mexico City. The Queens operation was run by a brother and sister who had the slaves living in their house. They stayed on the street un-

til they had \$100 to give to their bosses.

APPROPRIATE CLOTHING: The deaf trinket-sellers were forced to don signs saying "I am deaf."

SCORE: 3.12

57. Thrill Killers

ELEMENTS: In Rocky Point, N.Y., Oliver Stone fan William Soddors shot an

McMorrow, and then dumped his eviscerated body into Central Park's lake. Two New Jersey boys allegedly shot two pizza-delivery men to see "what it felt like"—presumably while sisters were giving birth in restrooms.

ORIGINALITY: Two people decided to find and kill their own pizza delivery guy after watching the New Jersey ones on Geraldo Rivera's "Teen Thrill Killers" segment.

SCORE: 3.02

58. The Clinton Inaugural

ELEMENTS: The Presidential Inauguration Committee inexplicably spent more than \$40 million on soirees to celebrate Clinton's *second* inauguration. Hillary had her hair done, and it didn't look all that bad. Tickets to most balls were at least \$150, some were much more. Performers included Michael Bolton, Sheryl Crow, Kenny G, and the turbulent Roger Clinton. "It's better the second time around," the president said nonsensically, "because America is better the second time around."

MUSIC WITH LYRICS: Lyrics of "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay" were modified by veiny, cosmic-haired Michael Bolton to "I left my home in Arkansas."

SCORE: 2.95

59. Knicks Bench Clearer

ELEMENTS: Another team that paid a fortune custom-building a roster to dethrone the Bulls, blows it all in one mad, malicious minute in the Eastern Conference semifinals. A bench-clearing brawl against the cooler-headed Heat resulting in the suspensions of Patrick Ewing, John Starks, Allan Houston, Larry Johnson, and Charlie Ward proved just enough to enable the Heat to rally from a 3-1 deficit and eliminate them. P.J. Brown, of the Heat, said, "I didn't expect this kind of attention. I was the top story on American Journal, ahead of O.J. Simpson... People think I'm the big, bad villain. They're using words like 'body-slam' and 'vicious.' I don't even know how to spell 'vicious.'" Brown was the 1997 recipient of the NBA's J. Walter Kennedy Citizenship Award.

VISUAL EXCITEMENT: P.J. Brown, knocked down by midget Charlie Ward, picked up midget and viciously body-slammed him.

SCORE: 2.91

56. THE WNBA



ELEMENTS: The WNBA experienced its first setback during the opening game when Lisa Leslie attempted a slam-dunk and failed ignominiously. The 6' 5" center said, "I think it would have been huge for women's basketball...and I kind of ran right into the rim." After the opening week, the feeble WNBA was averaging 38.6% from the field and a horrific 22.5 turnovers per game. NBC and ESPN relentlessly promoted the league, but it sputtered. The league only has four of the Women's "Dream Team" members. The base salary is \$50,000 and a few players make about \$1 million.

WAVING OF ARMS: The ball, at 28.5 inches, is an inch smaller and comes in two-toned color with swathes of orange and off-white. The WNBA spent months designing the woman on the ball's emblem, making her features racially generic. Much was also spent on research to determine the ball's colors. No color tested makes ball go into basket more often.

SCORE: 3.06

off-duty fireman to death "just for fun" and was turned in by his buzzkill dad. Bill Cosby's son, Ennis, was shot dead after he got a flat tire on a L.A. freeway. In New York City, two 15-year-olds—one the daughter of a wealthy East Side businessman, the other an altar boy who attended a private school—stabbed a strange 44-year-old real estate agent with whom they'd been drinking, Michael



60. Sodomy

FADE IN: A misted, winter pond in a piney northern wilderness. Light is just rising above the dark hills. Sodomy, face pixilated, is fastening the laces of a spectacularly scuffed pair of ice skates.

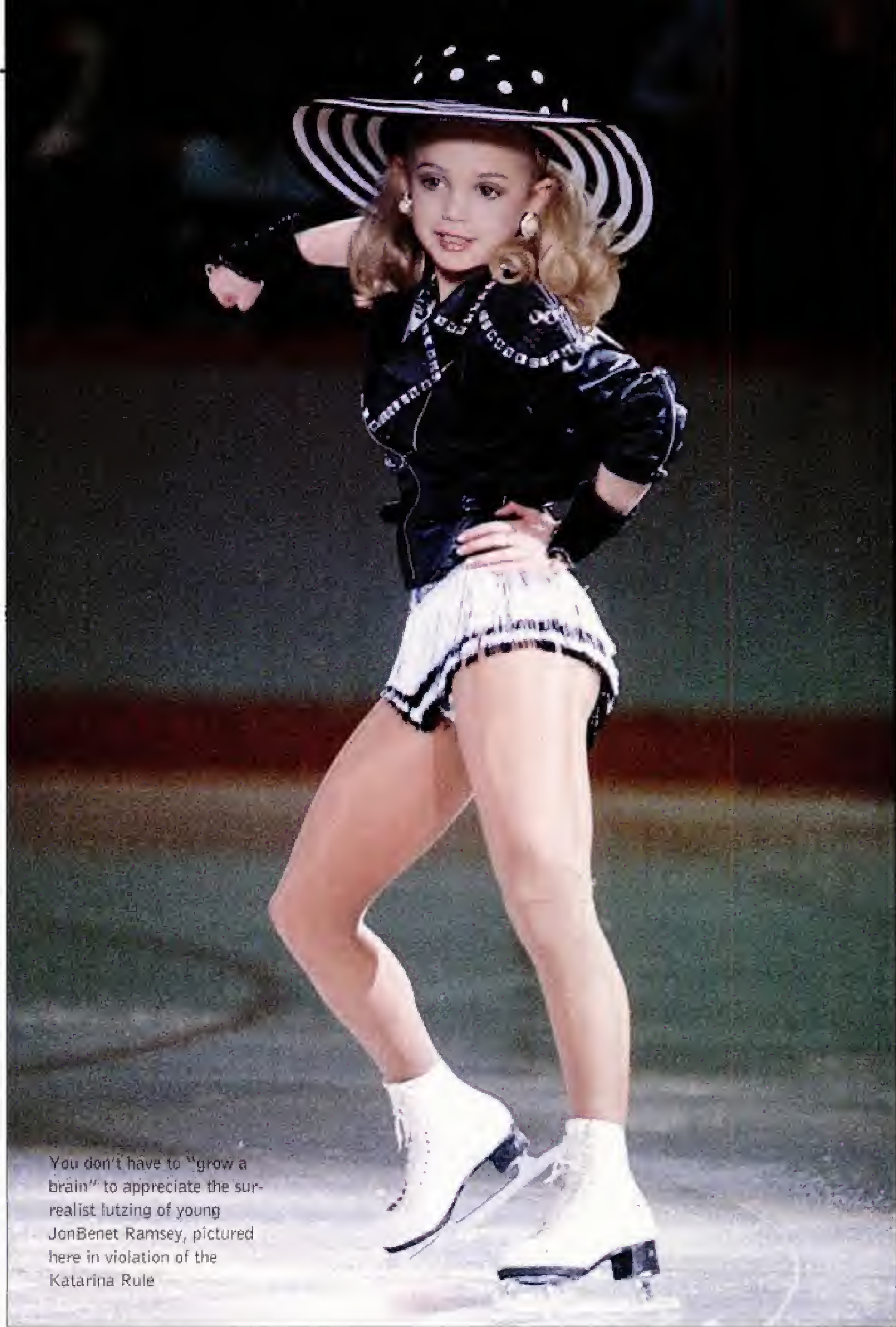
Tesh: "To some, Sodomy is a cipher. Is it anal? {Cut to couple having anal sex} Is it oral? {Shot of couple having oral sex} Who knows? But if Sodomy makes one think of anything—getting up before dawn and lacing up those worn boots which many would gladly throw away—it is indomitability and pluck."

Sodomy takes to the ice uneasily, glancing in each direction, but soon is whizzing confidently through a practice routine of figures imposées.

"It hasn't been an easy road for this ubiquitous, this...often illegal little skater."

Sodomy lutzers perfectly in the rimy air, but then Wanda-Beazels, falling on the entrance edge of a jump. Slowly, in obvious pain, Sodomy gets back to its feet, dusts off the ice chips, and returns to practicing, clearly gaining confidence.

"But thanks to six gay Montanans who brought suit on Sodomy's behalf, the skater prevented from performing legally in every state in the Union, not to mention the Armed Forces, can now skate its gutsy heroics on the national stage. For the one thing that you can always count on from sodomy is spunk."



You don't have to "grow a brain" to appreciate the surrealist lutz-ing of young JonBenet Ramsey, pictured here in violation of the Katarina Rule

DID YOU KNOW?

During the 1991 World Championship, Midori Ito, when attempting a triple lutz combination in a tight corner, jumped out of the rink and into the camera pits on the other side. Still finished fourth.

Law of the Rink

"THE KATERINA RULE"

While clothing may reflect the music chosen, it must not be garish, theatrical, or revealing. Men may not reveal their chests; women must cover their posteriors, especially when they have really good ones.

The rule is named for Katarina Witt, who wore too revealing an outfit in competition, ironically at the expense of a less-attractive competitor in an equally revealing costume.





63. STAR WARS AGAIN

ELEMENTS: *Star Wars* re-release bonuses: moving Dewbacks, extended X-wing footage. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, more footage of the Wampa, new shots of the Cloud City. The fresh licensing of duvets, mugs, T-shirts and wallpaper bearing film logos. *Star Wars* (1977) made \$461 million, the first movie to gross \$400 million domestically.

MUSIC WITH LYRICS: The rereleased *Return of the Jedi* features a new song by "Sy Snoodles and Band."

SCORE: 2.68

61. Law Is Still Cool

ELEMENTS: In October, O.J. Simpson finally got his comeuppance when he was driven to call a Court TV phone-in program to note that lawyer Barry Scheck's "Jewishness, and that New York style of his" might not play well with a jury.

UTILIZATION OF ICE: The public post-OJ fascination with *voir dire* procedure and evidence-admissibility dragged Johnnie Cochran's *Cochran and Company* to the screen, where it joined such pre-existing legal nerdfests as *Burden of Proof* and Geraldo Rivera's *Rivera Live*.

SCORE: 2.79

62. Martian Rocks

ELEMENTS: Goofy naming of rocks by Mars Pathfinder team captures hearts of nation. Flat Top, Casper, Chimp, Couch, Barnacle Bill, Yogi, Hippo, Stripe, Pumpkin, Shark Wedge, Squid, Hedgehog, Half Dome. "Although it's very exciting work, it can get tedious analyzing the rocks, so naming them is a means of comedy and entertainment," said a smug public affairs officer for the NASA lab. "Hey, we have to do something to keep these rocks straight. And we get to have some fun, too." Much made of project's overall cheapness at \$250 million. Less fanfare over \$25 million cost of 22 lb. remote-control vehicle itself.

SPEED: Impressive 0.4 meters per minute.

ORIGINALITY: Three Yemenis filed a lawsuit against NASA for trespass, claiming that they inherited Mars from their ancestors 3,000 years ago.

CLEANNES OF MOVES: Specialized rock-surveying machine only moves cleanly if there are no rocks in way. Otherwise gets stuck.

SCORE: 2.77

64. Anti-Ads

ELEMENTS: Patronizingly Gen X-ish ABC slogans on plain yellow background: "Laughter is the best medicine. Unless you're really sick. Then you should call 911." "You can talk to your wife anytime." Amstel ads revolve around bible-belter "Garrison Boyd" and his fictional efforts to keep the Dutch beer out of the US: Miller Lite "Dick" commercials in which a fictional "creative superstar" engineers utterly random, surreal commercials.

UTILIZATION OF ICE: Jeff Barnes, 27, face of Dick: "My face is on TV, people call me Dick more than they used to and I bought new guitars," Miller Lite sales up 3.6%.

SCORE: 2.61

65. Pious Afghanis

ELEMENTS: Under new, ultra-religious Taliban government, members of the General Dept. for the Preservation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice drive around town in old pick-up trucks with chrome roll bars, flashing blue lights, Kalashnikovs, and rocket-propelled grenades enforcing bizarre laws. Women are banned from school and work, must "walk calmly and avoid creating noise by their footsteps," and not show their ankles or faces if they don't want to get flogged. Men caught watching Indian dance movies may be killed. And "[i]f we catch people using paper, they will face serious punishment," said one official. New regime is particularly fond of stoning adulterers, amputating the hands and feet of thieves, and staging public executions. In rape and murder cases, the victim's relatives are allowed to do the killing.

SPEED: After two adulterers were stoned to death, police chief, Mr. Alhaj Maulavi

Qalamuddin, said: "Just two people, that's all, and we ended adultery in Kandahar forever."

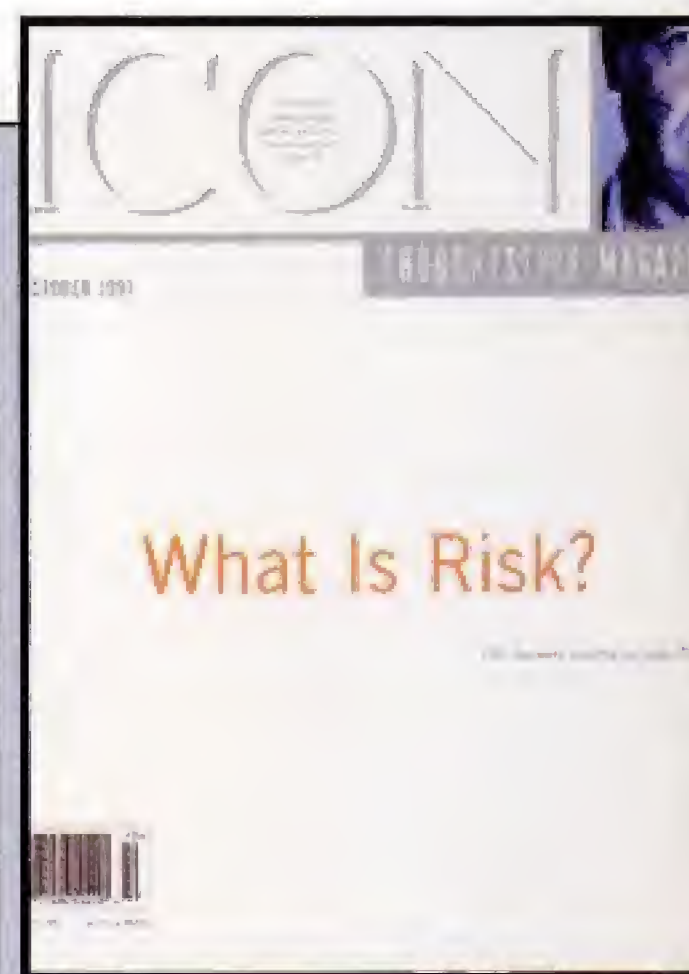
KATARINA RULE: They're taking this one pretty seriously in Afghanistan right now.

SCORE: 2.50

66. Degeneration of the Food Supply

ELEMENTS: Ranchers are feeding their cows huge quantities of chicken shit, which is about 10 times cheaper than alfalfa and, if correctly treated, almost as healthy. Problem is, nobody bothers to correctly treat it. In the spring, the Federal government distributed hepatitis-A-infected strawberries to public schools in 17

67. MEN'S MAGAZINES



ELEMENTS: Men are now apparently boring. In June, *Details* decided work, not leisure, is what defines young men today. "I started asking myself a while ago," said Joe Dolce, editor, "how is a man rebelling today? Oddly enough, I came up with the idea of work." James Truman has said, "It's much sexier to be the next Bill Gates than the next band." Dolce was soon fired and the job idea was given up. *Icon Thoughtstyle* (a magazine for men published by its president, CEO, and editorial director, David Getson, 25) was born. The magazine sought to discern "why and how certain people emerge as symbols of accomplishment." It included interviews with such symbols of accomplishment as balladeer John Tesh. A magazine devoted to clothed breasts, *Maxim*, also saw its first issue hit the stands this year.

EXPRESSION AND ATTITUDE: Getson and his partner developed a nice routine. "If he doesn't come prepared to a meeting with all the right materials we need, he has to drop and give me 10 push-ups right on the spot."

SCORE: 2.38

states. Mid-August saw the recall of 25 million pounds of beef destined for such places as Burger King, Boston Market, Sam's Club, and Safeway. It was jumping with *E. coli*. **SPEED:** Dan Glickman, the secretary of agriculture, promised that his Department would finally upgrade the current means of food inspection from the "poke and sniff" method.

VARIETY: In western Kentucky, where squirrel brains are a delicacy, 11 cases of Mad Squirrel Disease have been reported. According to the University of Kentucky, Mad Elk, Mad Mink, Mad Deer, and Mad Rat Diseases also pose dangers.

SCORE: 2.43

68. Amy Molitor

ELEMENTS: Back in 1986 her boyfriend, Alex Kelly, borrowed her jeep, raped someone else in it, fled the country eight days before his trial, took up with a Swede during his eight-year break from a Connecticut jail, brought this blonde back to Darien in 1994 after he surrendered in Switzerland, took Amy for a ride in another one of her cars, flipped it over while trying to elude the police, left her on the road to fend for her unconscious, five-broken-rib self, pled not guilty to the rape, lost, and is now in jail. Amy lived with him throughout the trial, and went to court every day. She is typically described as "long-suffering girlfriend."

KATARINA RULE: Defiant raper-datist Molitor wore a brown pant suit and a semiotically charged pearl necklace to the sentencing.

UTILIZATION OF ICE: Unable to wean herself of the Kelly experience, Molitor moved in with Kelly's parents after he started his jail term.

SCORE: 2.22

69. The Myth of Wraps

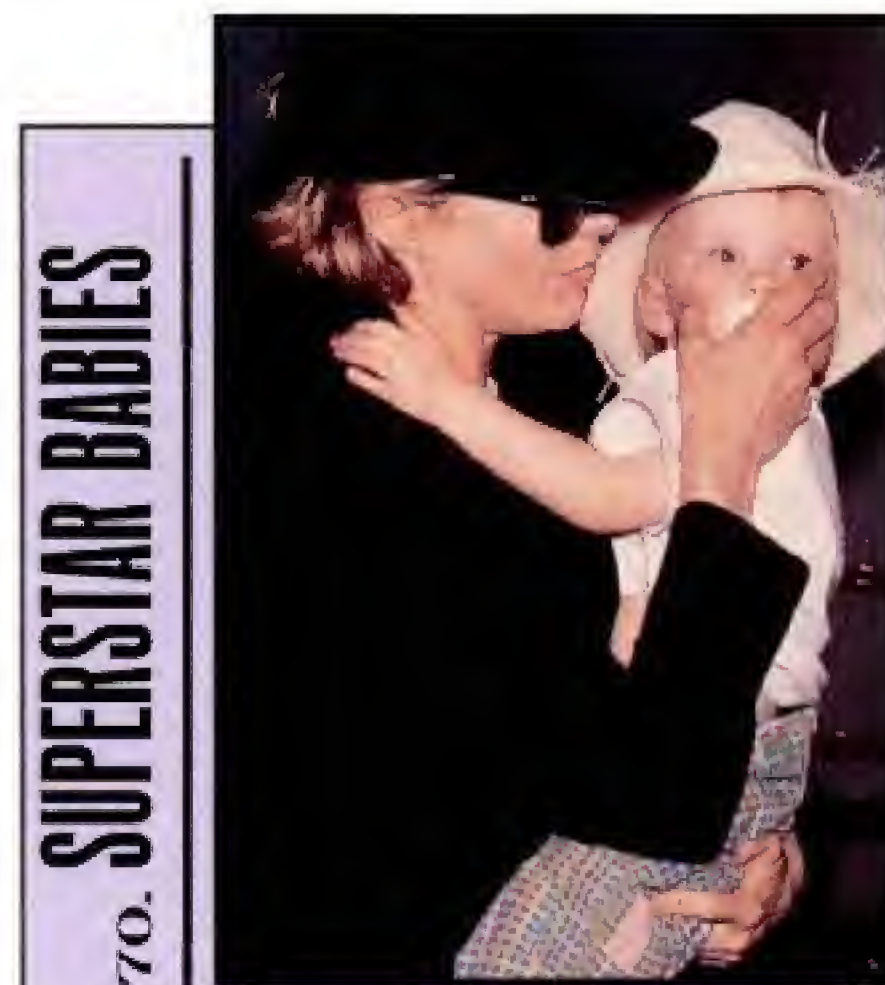
ELEMENTS: The wrap is a tortilla folded around a carbohydrate (usually rice) and a protein (maybe lean poultry, maybe marinated tofu). You are usually given a choice of green, white, yellow, blue, and sometimes red tortilla. You are often given a choice of exotic moistener from a range of chutneys, mayonnaises, and salsas.

VARIETY: No choice of rice, which is what you end up eating most of.

SCORE: 2.16

71. Plague of Deformed Frogs

ELEMENTS: In August and September, 35 horrifying frogs with extra or missing limbs were found in Connecticut. Scientists don't know why. Theories as to possible cause range from chemicals used to kill ticks, to a



ELEMENTS: According to the King of Pop's witless, well-paid spawning-partner, Debbie Rowe, Michael "feeds [the baby, Prince Michael Junior], he changes his diapers, he reads to him, and he sings to him...He takes naps with him. I don't need to be there because I would have nothing to do." Madonna claims to want to give Lourdes—who made headlines this year after a photograph appeared of the hairless, illiterate child not even coming close to falling out the unbarred window of her mother's apartment—some siblings.

UTILIZATION OF ICE SURFACE: Mom Jackson sees the baby in Paris every few weeks, though she still lives in the seedy Van Nuys section of LA. "It's unusual," she says of the arrangement.

GRACE: Tasteful Michael sold pictures of his infant to British tabloids. Jackson says he is in bliss "24 hours a day."

VARIETY: *US* magazine says surrogate mothers will carry Madonna's additional children while her first choice of "dad" is likely to be a homosexual.

SCORE: 2.11

thinning of the ozone layer. There have been 235 deformed frogs found at 37 sites around New England and New York since last year.

ATTITUDE AND EXPRESSION: One upbeat Pfizer scientist working on the problem suggested that the deformed-frog invasion might be a good chance for the public to do some old-fashioned, hands-on science.

SCORE: 2.10

72. "Snarky"

ELEMENTS: According to media: people

on *SNL* made "snarky portrayals." VH1's Pop-Up Videos had "snarky comments," Tennis players used "snarky talk." Chris Rock's HBO show "got off to a snarky start." The Dandy Warhols' hit single had a "snarky title," ("Not if You Were the Last Junkie on Earth"). Gen Xers were reading "snarky free weeklies." **ORIGINALITY:** *The New York Observer* had "snarky commentators."

SCORE: 2.04

73. Proliferation of TV News Magazines

ELEMENTS: In the 1994-95 season there were 12 of them; in the 1996-97 season there were 18, a 50 percent increase. Ratings for news magazines have dropped during the past three seasons.

SPEED: *Dateline* went to four episodes a week, occasioning a 300% increase in sightings of "Stone" Phillips.

SCORE: 1.97

74. Keith Flint

ELEMENTS: Multiply pierced dancing loon for English band Prodigy, Keith "Firestarter" Flint made the covers of *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* simultaneously. Some Firestarter speak: "There's no practicing, you've never done lyrics before, you can't sing, and someone's just thrown you on the stage in front of 5,000 people—very, very scary."

ATTITUDE AND EXPRESSION: Keith Flint on Keith Flint: "Hey, that guy's not dancing, and he's not a Morris dancer...what is he? He's up the front, he's standing there, he's nodding his head, he's doing a bit of a Freddie Mercury, he's sticking his arse out, he's going 'look at me, I'm mentally deficient!'"

SCORE: 1.92

75. Hamas

ELEMENTS: Hamas' "Martyrs' Brigade for Freeing Prisoners" took responsibility for suicide bombings in Israel, calling it "a painful response" to an Israeli rocket attack on the Lebanese city of Sidon in which several Palestinians were killed.

UTILIZATION OF ICE: Imperfect. Hamas suicide-bomber-in-training Rashid Saqqer confessed to authorities that "I couldn't kill myself in a soccer stadium. Yes, they are Zionists and unbelievers. But I couldn't do it there."

SCORE: 1.77



Oprah Winfrey, queen of the book club, with several volumes of easily digestible, life-affirming fiction neatly sewn into the muscle of each thigh.



76. Les Crapauds

FADE IN ON: *The French, skating slowly up and down, pretending that there is an audience.*

Tesh: "The French nation. Sad, mysterious smokers. Down in the dumps since being humiliated in the North American Non-Invitational in 1763—their hopes further dashed by perpetual losses to disciplined English skaters—repeatedly trounced by Prussia, by Germany, and even by, some judges say, plucky little Algeria—unable at every point to organize themselves for serious international competition... Yes, *the French*, the proud, the unmedicated—the megalomaniacal, the unbathed, the nasty—have finally, tragically, gone totally mad. Though their fan-base world-wide long ago eroded down to a handful of undergraduate girls and the boys who love them, the French still think they have 'it'—whatever 'it' is, in professional skating—and are condemned, for the glory of 'La Belle France' to prove it."

The French attempt coherent government reform—having refused, again, Anglo-Saxon models—and fall disastrously on their ass. Their crown flies off, and they yardsale ignominiously in a litter of baguettes, dirty postcards, and defective condoms.

"In the words of Jaques Chirac, 'We have our own model and we intend to stick to it'. Brave words... from an insane French man.

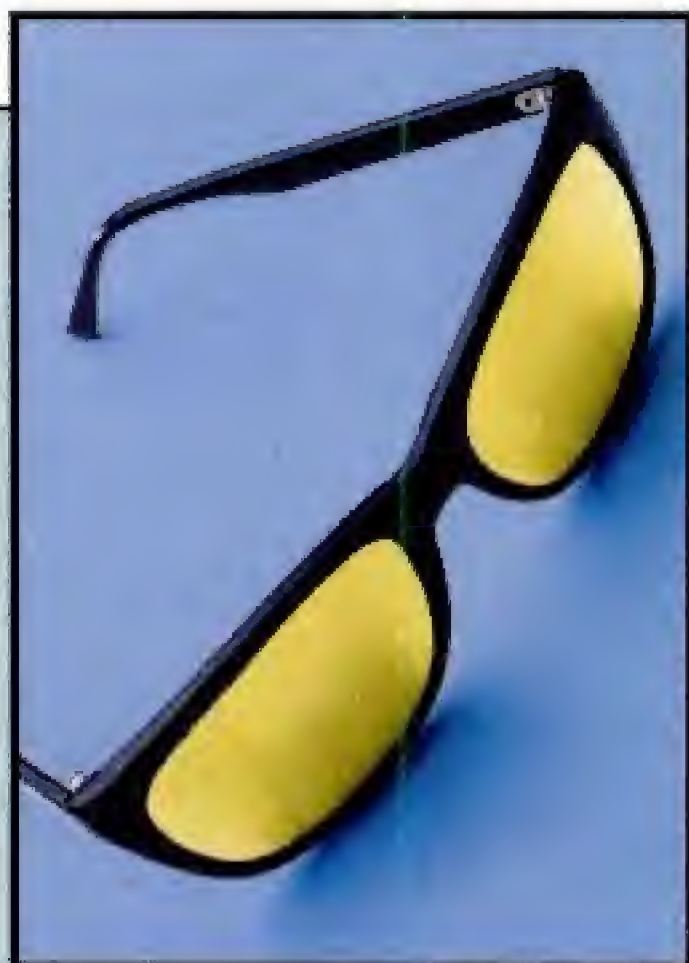
Law of the Rink

THE WAXEL

Simply put, a Waxel is a failed Axel that leaves the practitioner skidding across the ice like a lightweight Zamboni wearing eyeliner. The Axel itself is a beautiful move, a 540 degree spinning jump named for the Norwegian trick-skater, Alex Paulsen. Waxels typically ensue when those whose high-spirits outweigh their talent "lose the forward edge" of the skate at takeoff.



77. THESE GLASSES



ORIGINALITY: Retro. SCORE: 1.85

78. Chain-Novel Phenomenon

ELEMENTS: *Esquire* devoted its back page to a short serial story to be written by five overpaid authors. Made big mistake of hiring I'll-be-home-for-me-tea-soon-Mam! Irish memoirist Frank McCourt to set the ball rolling. Story is miasma of booze and Gaelic recrimination, despite best efforts of Jackie Collins. A forty-six installment mystery story (beginning and ending with passages by cyber-novice John Updike) was run as a contest by online bookstore Amazon.com.

TECHNICAL MERIT: Unreadable but valuable to the stalking community for its psychological insight into authors.

SCORE: 1.75

79. Hysterical Lawsuits

ELEMENTS: Courts are now sclerotic with women using lawsuits to get men to apologize to them. Autumn Jackson, 22, attempted to blackmail Bill Cosby into giving her \$40 million dollars, threatening to tell the world that she was his out-of-wedlock daughter. She was promptly convicted of extortion and conspiracy. In the case of the attractive Paula Jones, her legal staff eventually jumped ship. Jones' out-of-his-league Arkansas real-estate lawyer quit after Jones had neglected to tell him two years earlier about Bill Clinton's supposedly distinctive genitalia and because she has failed to deny that the state trooper who invited her to visit Clinton said, "The Governor says you make his knees knock," indicating that Jones knew very well what awaited her.

GRACE: Jones claims that then-Arkansas Governor Clinton instructed her to "kiss it."

SCORE: 1.66

80. Indonesia

ELEMENTS: Fires lighted to clear land went wildly out of control, producing enough smoke to enshroud much of Southeast Asia. On the island of Sulawesi, a Garuda Airlines airbus crashed on the island of Sumatra killing 234 people. The crash was possibly caused by the smoke. Two days later an earthquake took another 14 lives and seriously injured more than 300. Fatal smog caused supertanker accidents in the Straits of Malacca.

VARIETY: Indonesia is suffering worst drought in half a century.

SCORE: 1.61

82. Federal Gov't Having Radiated Its People

ELEMENTS: Atmospheric nuclear-bomb tests mainly done in Nevada from 1951 to 1962 bombarded millions of Americans with releases of radiation at least 10 times larger than those caused at Chernobyl. The doses were large enough to produce 25,000 to 50,000 cases of thyroid cancer nationally—of which 2,500 can be expected to be fatal.

TECHNICAL MERIT: People living in some Western states received doses averaging 5 to 16 rads. Children had doses up to 10 times higher. Radioactive iodine reach-

es its human target through milk, often during "quiet time."

SCORE: 1.44

83. Rogue Pilot Stealing Plane and Crashing it

ELEMENTS: Capt. Craig Burton, an Air Force pilot, flew his armed A-10 Thunderbolt into the strangely-named New York Mountains in Colorado, 800 miles off his Arizona course. Burton's family was outraged by the suggestion—now dropped—that he killed himself because his parents were nonviolent Jehovah's Witnesses upset about his being in the army.

TECHNICAL MERIT: Plane's bombs have yet to be recovered.

SCORE: 1.38

84. It Suddenly Being the Late Nineties

ELEMENTS: According to the "Sixties" model of decade analysis that all generations must use from here on in, we have just moved out of our idyllic Aquarian period. One more fun summer, then metaphorical descent into violence, mud, and tainted brown acid. What does this mean for us in the Nineties? Probably some sort of nasty cyber-breakdown.

KATARINA RULE: The time has come to grow beard to match long hair. Leave four-part harmonies to younger siblings, learn art of writhing viciously to tribal bongo sound.

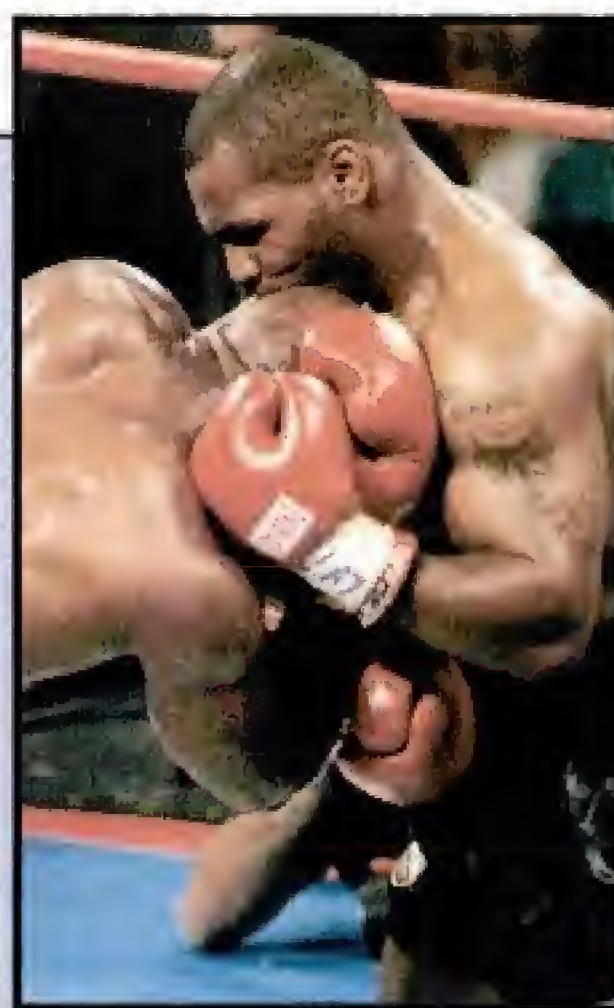
SCORE: 1.32

85. Aborted Domestic Terrorism

ELEMENTS: On June 28, Big Mike Tyson, wife-batterer, convicted rapist, and professional pugilist, stunned the world by becoming violent in response to a series of damaging headbutts, biting the headbutting Evander Holyfield one time on each ear and spitting out the pieces. Boxing commentators tried to pretend that this was an indelible blot on an otherwise civilized sport, with such comments as: "Mike Tyson has managed to turn boxing—once considered the 'sport of kings'—into a laughing stock."

CARRIAGE AND STYLE: Tyson's attempts to excuse his savagery leant perhaps too heavily on the hypothesis that thanks to the gash he had sustained from Holyfield's headbutts—ruled legal by referee Mills

81. MIKE TYSON



Lane—"when I go home, my kids will be scared of me."

SCORE: 1.52

ELEMENTS: Two Jordanians, Lafi Khalil, 22, and Ghazi Ibrahim Abu Maizar, 23, were wounded by gunfire when arrested in a police raid in Brooklyn. "I am a suicide bomber and there are at least four bombs ready to go," Abu Maizar told police. In fact, police found five bombs. Their plot tar-

threat of legal action.

SCORE: 1.05

88. Foreign Mothers

ELEMENTS: A Russian immigrant, Tatiana Glotova, left her toddler in Madison Square Park to play unwatched while she worked. In April, a Russian couple was arrested for leaving their 4-year old

ELEMENTS: One early morning in March, at the Palm Beach estate of golfer Greg Norman, the Chief Executive toppled down a flight of stairs and banjaxed his quadriceps tendon. "It wasn't our fault, Norman said, 'but you feel guilty.'" Surgeons reattached the tendon to the First Kneecap, but Mr. Clinton was some time recuperating, using crutches as well as full-on Franklin Roosevelt polio sticks.

TECHNICAL MERIT: In a classic case of adding miniature-electronics to injury, President was advised, as soon as he started to recover from the knee problem, that he needed hearing aids in each ear.

CLINTON ON CRUTCHES

86.



GRACE: Clinton was observed crutching slowly to the dedication of a memorial to Roosevelt. Deep traumatic embarrassment of having crippled President leaves mark on reeling populace.

SCORE: 1.17

geted Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue subway station, trains, bridges, and U.S. and Jewish interests world-wide.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Too high for the Egyptian accomplice who turned them in after deciding that he couldn't, after all, be bothered to vaporize himself on a crowded commuter train.

ORIGINALITY: Terrorists—like all terrorists—demanded the immediate release of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman and Ramzi Ahmed Yousef.

SCORE: 1.24

87. Ted Turner

ELEMENTS: Skull-faced mogul Ted Turner's net worth shot up from \$2.2 billion to \$3.2 billion, largely on the strength of a 50% rise in Time Warner stock. Because he's slightly strange, Turner decided to give \$1 billion to the UN.

ATTITUDE AND EXPRESSION: On learning of Ted's gift, wife Jane Fonda burst into tears, supposedly of joy.

UTILIZATION OF ICE: Turner briefly considered buying the 1 billion US debt from the embattled UN and then demanding repayment from Congress on

home alone while they went to a bar. Police rescued the girl after hearing her screaming from a window.

CARRIAGE AND STYLE: A Danish mother was arrested after leaving her tot in a baby-carriage outside a Lower East Side "restaurant."

SCORE: 0.95

89. Lilith Fair

ELEMENTS: Organized by dirgish folkie and aspiring activist Sara McLachlan—estrogen's Sir Bob Geldof—the Lilith Fair, a female-rock and scarf-merchandising festival, played 37 dates in July and August. Afraid-to-refuse sponsors included Boire, Borders Books and Music, and Nine West. Predictable sponsors included Planned Parenthood, and The Rape Abuse & Incest National Network.

ORIGINALITY: "Lilith" is a figure in Hebrew myth about a woman who was punished for seeing herself equal to Adam—but is also a girl's name, hence choice for title of festival.

KATARINA RULE: Merchandise included: bags, hats, jewelry, and, again, scarves.

SCORE: 0.85

90. Speed 2

ELEMENTS: Bomb-artist Willem Dafoe is an uplinked villain consulting a digital readout in a golf-club. Sandra Bullock, who possibly earns \$12 million per picture, again plays a girl-next-door in a dangerous high-velocity situation: an out-of-control luxury cruise ship.

VARIATION OF "SPEED": The average cruise ship goes about 20 "knots," or in layman's terms, very slowly.

SCORE: 0.79

91. TV's Tim Allen

ELEMENTS: TV's representative American male and Tool Timing—regular-joe Tim Allen will earn \$1.25 million per episode next season. Allen has kept faith with the Male Sciences by sometimes drinking a lot, then getting into a car, and driving himself around until he gets stopped and arrested.

CARRIAGE AND STYLE: When arrested for drunk driving, Allen failed four sobriety tests, achieving very low scores in the alphabet, and backwards counting. Allen counted, "87, 79, 78, 70, 69."

ORIGINALITY: Allen's dad was killed in a drunk driving accident in 1964. Spooky.

SCORE: 0.68

92. The Less-Than-Elusive Wildenbeast

ELEMENTS: Alec Wildenstein, 57, whose Dad is worth \$6 billion dollars, is in the throes of a bitter divorce with his horror-film bride, Jocelyn, who recently won the right to have the proceedings heard in public, and is asking \$200,000 a month in living expenses because, among other aristo-disabilities, she does not know how to use a toaster. At stake: a Kenyan spread with herds of exotic animals; a townhouse with a basement pool; one of those tasteful French chateaux.

KATARINA RULE: Ms. Wildenstein, 52, has had so much—and such shocking—plastic surgery that cameramen find her simply irresistible. Her husband has filed a complaint with the judge that the press is concentrating only on his wife's "unusual" looks.

CLEANNESS OF MOVES: Alec Wildenstein at one point allegedly whipped out a 9mm pistol when startled by his wife. Did not fire.

SCORE: 0.63

93. Roman Polanski

ELEMENTS: The pint-sized Pole was convicted in 1977 of six counts of drugging,

raping, and sodomizing—whatever that means—the then-13-year-old Samantha Geimer at Jack Nicholson's place. Polanski is now returning to the U.S., having served his time during a long exile in Paris. Geimer, now a mother living in Hawaii, has said that she forgives Polanski and that she has never wanted him to go to prison for his crimes.

SPEED: Polanski told Geimer that he wanted to photograph her for *Vogue*—then quickly provided her with Quaaludes and champagne.

TECHNICAL MERIT: Facing the prospect of 50 years in prison if convicted on all 6 charges, Polanski has pled guilty to one count of statutory rape in a plea-bargain agreement.

SCORE: 0.55

94. *ER* Live

ELEMENTS: Vomit flew, blood spurted, and 45% of all U.S. TV-viewers tuned in to the incessantly hyped hour-long live presentation of the impassioned lives, Olympian loves, and faux-documentary surgical techniques of America's favorite imitation doctors. The live broadcast went over well in Canada, too: the show was the highest rated program in Canadian television history.

CLEANNES OF MOVES: "The projectile vomiting, albeit the best live hurl in TV history, did not convincingly emanate from the patient's mouth."—*Chicago Tribune*

SCORE: 0.47

TIMOTHY MCVEIGH

98.



ELEMENTS: With one last chance to fulfill his potential as a colorful figure in U.S. History, Oklahoma bomber McVeigh used his sentencing speech to quote Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, "'Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or for ill, it teaches the whole people by its example.' That's all I have to say." Media and public baffled as to possible meaning. **DID NOT SKATE:** Automatic disqualification. **SCORE:** 0

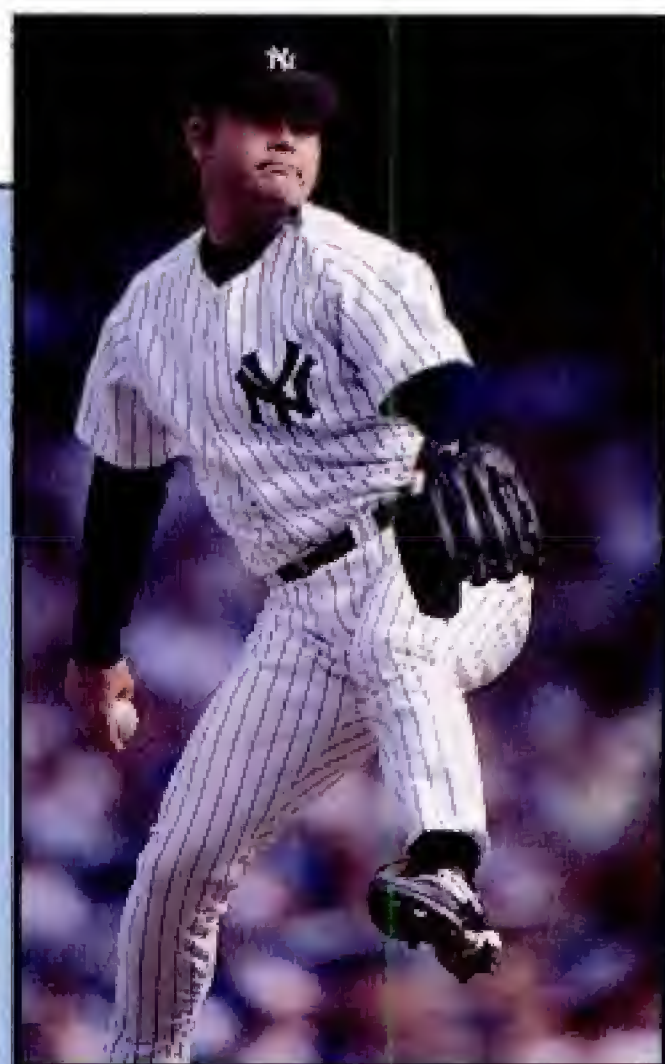
95. St. John's Wort

ELEMENTS: *Hypericum perforatum*, the latin name of St. John's Wort, one of the herbal remedies that was supposedly prescribed by history's Hippocrates, is a stubby plant with yellow blossoms, which blooms around the 25th of June—St. John's day. It is said to raise the levels of the chemical serotonin in the brain, and traditionally has been prescribed for

ELEMENTS: The oval Japanese power-pitcher landed a \$13 million contract with the New York Yankees without ever having pitched a major league game. Failed. Pitching coach Billy Connors told reporters Iribu would train like a Spartan in the offseason, while Iribu sat and smoked cigarettes behind him. Iribu's agent, Don Nomura, likened Iribu's contract situation with the San Diego Padres—who bought Iribu's rights—to a World War Two internment camp. **CARRIAGE AND STYLE:** Iribu spat at Milwaukee Brewer fans, and stamped violently on the pitcher's mound like a hot-headed bull who is becoming increasingly frustrated at his inability to play baseball.

HIDEKI IRIBU

96.



TECHNICAL MERIT: Tiny magnets taped to *chi* points on his body keep Iribu permanently on point of major psychotic outburst. **SCORE:** 0.22

people feeling sad. Modern users of the herb are mostly the famously depressed Germans.

UTILIZATION OF ICE: Often sold as "Herbal Phen Fuel," in an effort to attract jonesing Phen-Fen crazies."

SCORE: 0.32

97. The Real Olympic Bomber

ELEMENTS: Original suspect Richard Jewell asked Congress to probe the FBI's investigation of him and is planning to sue individual agents for violating his rights. Jewell has settled libel actions against CNN, and NBC—reportedly for \$500,000.

He also has lawsuits against various Atlanta newspapers and the *New York Post*. Authorities now say they believe the explosion is linked to two other Atlanta bombings—one at an abortion clinic and one at a gay nightclub.

GRACE: Jewell stumbled through two skits on the season premiere of *Saturday Night Live* and was not noticeably worse at making the audience "laugh" than was the rest of the cast.

DID NOT SKATE: Real Olympic terroristbomber still at large. **SCORE:** 0

99. The Cause of the Flight 800 Crash

ELEMENTS: None, really.

DID NOT SKATE: Faulty wiring might have sent high-voltage electricity blasting into fuel-measuring devices in the center fuel tank to cause the explosion that destroyed TWA Flight 800. Or it might have been a buildup of copper sulfite on a probe; a malfunction in the "fuel scavenge" pump; a buildup of static electricity; or a failure of wing tank wiring. Or some National Guard numb-nuts might have fired a rocket.

VARIETY: According to pornography's Al Goldstein, crash was handiwork of suicidal passengers protesting airline's typically poor service.

SCORE: 0

100. Campaign Finance Reform

DID NOT SKATE: Despite much meaningless waving of arms, nothing happened. Had something happened it would have been irritating and ineffectual. Automatic disqualification.

SCORE: 0



**AN EVENING SPENT BY
ONE MAN Among the
Literary Readings,
So-Called, of Manhattan,
CONTAINING SOME
SEVERAL INQUIRIES into
Dorks, and their Progress in
the Various Practices
of POETRY, PROSE,
and WORSE**

BY TOM COMMON

outside the Housing Works Used

Books Café in Soho there is, ominously, a large desk abandoned on the sidewalk. The place itself is a sort of fern bar, with socialists instead of ferns. Spoons are tinkling in coffee cups in the café at the rear. Except for a few typically hostile vegans milling around in unraveled jergas and Unabomber huaraches, most of the customer-base seems to be comprised of therapists of one sort or another. We get a cappuccino, and sit down at a blond wood table in the expensively lighted rear of the charity shop.

This evening's event is billed in our trusty *Village Press* as "Great Spanish Speaking Poets." We do not allow ourselves to become too aroused, however; we suspect that all the great Spanish-speaking poets are dead. Besides, we are not here to ogle stars—like the written word's late Pablo Neruda—but rather to understand why that mysterious section of our newspaper labeled "Readings" is getting thicker as we near the century's close.

Tonight, the stylings of Pablo Neruda and others will be read by what the compere expansively calls "A group of wonderful actors." The actors, we assume, are the people at the table next over, practicing Castilian lisps and simulating Teresan ecstasy. This is obviously a big evening for them. When do they start? It's a big evening for us, as well.

Aware, suddenly, of a noise, we turn to the stage. Ramon Tijuana*, who probably comes from Ozone Park but does a fair imitation of an Andalusian pervert with a greasy bell of hair, is fretting a classical instrument. He is sitting under directory signs which say "Cooking Gardening Children," a prescription that sounds like it contains one unnecessary step. We peer at him. He is not a poet. Ten minutes pass musically, and then, as we tense for poetry, a woman

gets up and appeals to our senses of charity, asking for big donations. She is not a poet, either.

Tijuana recommences with the Iberian chloroform. Does a man playing the guitar, before some actors perform, for some reason now count as a "Reading"? What would Pablo Neruda say? We dubiously consult our newspaper again as staffers circle, shaking slitted tins.

a proper reading

Tower Books on Lafayette Street. We are at a "poetry slam," which is an affair where poets stand up, perform, and then are judged like Olympic divers. About thirty people—all performers, as it turns out—sit in folding chairs amidst the brightly lit downtown "product". The MC has dreads and leather pants and is saying things like "Let's give it up for Mustafa Shabazz!" Not a moment too soon: *poetry*. He introduces a large, chuckling woman in a giant smock and head-wrap who begins bellowing out of lungs the size of sports stadiums: "*The gold-tipped dick...we let it turn us into three-way whores...*" Her poem is about not being able to go down the street without being harassed for sex. Obviously, it is a fictional situation, but no one laughs, except with joy and delight. The "reader"—not reading anything, often seems to be improvising—is constantly interrupted by oceanic applause. "*Whenever you see the dick shine,*" the poet, concludes "*...get your ass and run...*"

She is applauded as if she is Princess Diana, returned breathtakingly to earth with an armload of Thalidomide orphans. She sits down beaming. The poet readjusts her head wrap as she is awarded very high scores. She hasn't read anything, and nothing she said was poetry, yet by all signs she has just "won" a poetry reading. This all seems pretty advanced.

Next up is a suburban-looking girl who is all dressed up to look "downtown"—both bohemian and postmodern—in a shortsleeved black turtleneck and some sort of checked bell-bottoms. I make a mental note: *You can not only recite poetry with impunity here, you can dress exactly like a poet without anyone carping at you.*

"Let's give it up," says the MC, "for Monica Trellice."

Monica reads about "Soho sidewalks, wet with raindrops" and so forth—really exciting poetical stuff. She and her love (not present in the audience: perhaps he is dead) go "stepping over puddle-iscious discus"...the streetlight "radiant on our outfits of black." It is a poem about unexamined young love. Monica, compared to the previous reader, in terms of strictly technical merit, is Wallace Stevens; but gets hosed in the scoring.

A damaged person in a print dress then gets up and reads something that confuses a pogromized ancestor first with Christ, and, then (in ascending order) self. Her crucifixion—personally complete with nails and Romans—is that she has had a bad time with the opposite sex. After that, a poetess named Kathy who declaims in a broad "English" accent (we cannot pinpoint the dialect) on the theme of being used by men.

Each reader has been a woman, and each has read about love. Three of them have had a hell of a time of it, too, and in a way seem to be modern analogs to the authoress of Twain's "Ode to Stephen Dowling Botts, Dec'd."—a departed young lady who is happier, Huck reckons, in the grave.

Though she nearly has a nearly Dickinsonian grasp of allusion, Kathy gets the judges' shaft as well. The MC makes note of the number of people on his list who still have to read. There are a lot of them. In fact, the only audience members are a guy standing behind a pillar, and me.

C commerce

My Name's Dale, and I'm a Writer. Help Me. A chat.

SPY: Is this the Gotham Writers Workshop?

GW: Yeah.

SPY: Hi, I was just reading your leaflet about how writers...need other writers...and it really struck a bell with me. When do you think I might be able to speak to a writer...mano and mano?

GW: Are you interested in taking a course, or you just—

SPY: I think so—I think I need to—

GW: Or you want to speak to someone about what class to take?

SPY: Just, just, just...writing. I have been feeling, like you say, very alone. With my writing.

GW: Ah huh.

SPY: Like sort of a cloud.

GW: Yeah.

SPY: I was wondering, can you send someone out? A writer? [Put on hold]

GW: Hi, this is [indistinct]. Can I help you?

SPY: Yeah, I was trying to...I was reading your leaflet...About the writers needing writers, and it just really struck a bell with me. I was wondering how soon I could get to speak...to a writer.

GW: Well you're speaking to a writer right now!

SPY: (excited) Really?

GW: Yeah. Not a famous one or anything, but... (laughs).

SPY: I think I need to come along...I always thought poetry had to rhyme, and you say it doesn't.

GW: (silent)

SPY: Do you have some class today?

GW: We don't have any poetry classes starting today...but we've got a poetry class starting a week from today.

SPY: Oh no, no, that's

To Barnes & Noble, where the newspaper promises us a reading by a relatively well-known published author named Anne Paolucci. The newspaper lists the start time of the reading as eight P.M. It is already ten past eight, but the crowd could care less. Our eyes glance down the boards announcing future readings. We notice that the subjects are different from those at smaller places. The audience for a Barnes & Noble reading, apparently, comes to look at dwarf celebrities and cookbook magi, guys who write books about years in Provence, thinking positively, or the differences between men and women.

If anything, though, the Barnes & Noble crowd is slightly rattier than the crowds at our previous two stops. The borderline homeless grumble and fart at courtesy tables and haunt the men's rooms; girls wait for their bowling dates. A handful of people trickle around buying the books they want to be thought to be reading, I think uncharitably.

Everything's packaged here, and the readings, on the 2nd floor, are packaged as well. There is a lectern, a signing table, presided over by a swarthy, bearded and chrome-domed literato in a wild yellow tie. We're convinced, sans glasses, that he looks exactly like Allen Ginsberg, but are persuaded by a sighted friend that he actually looks exactly like Salman Rushdie. Not much difference there, anyway, if you mentally dress Rushdie in caftan and vibrator.

The reader still hasn't appeared. We glance around and observe a clerk who is wearing that Absolut "Father's Day" tie that the *New York Times* sent out to all its subscribers a few months ago. The tie is patterned with spermatozoa in the shape of Absolut bottles. Let's face it, it's probably far from the first time a Barnes & Noble clerk has had a tie covered with sperm. This commercial scene isn't it for us: we're after authenticity.

Space travel

Our newspaper next sends us over to the Asian-American Writer's Workshop on St. Mark's Place. This is a performance

Tower Books is a safe space: You cannot only recite poetry with impunity, you can dress exactly like a poet without anyone carping at you.



space plus bookshop plus, evidently, "workshop"—though I could not identify any corner where anyone, if they happened to be Asian-American, might come in to cobble away at *ficciones*. At any rate, everything is nice. The place is clean, and the stage-hangings are freshly laundered sheets. This is no bohemian catacomb, with rats running across your face—everything is clean and quiet. A cheap but pin-clean fan turns winsomely at the back of the space. It isn't doing much, that fan, but it is doing its best very seriously.

A straight-banged and doll-like female writer named Patti Kim is sitting very erect in a folding chair, reading details from her childhood into a giant microphone. Kim is reading from the very end of her book yet is dealing with her first day of school—did she write it in reverse? is that a trend?—with truly impressive orange-peel and pencil-shavings sub-Proustian intensity. Her work seems to be all about what it was like to be awfully clever, to have a tuna sandwich in a Hello Kitty lunchbox, and to have embarrassing, monoglot, gold-toothed, but eventually life-affirming immigrant parents.

But also there's fun: *A monkey's butt is red*, she reads. *Red as an apple. Red as an apple*. This goes over well. Her character reads painful unsent letters that prove how indomitable is the human spirit. Kim is applauded. Etiquette, I'm realizing, demands that you always applaud at these things as if your life has been altered. Or better yet, reflected: the audience consists of about a dozen Asians. If not a sea of Asian faces, it's at least a pond of them. All the audience being Asian strikes me very curiously. Maybe you can't always have an audience of nervous impending performers, but you can get a salubrious homogeneity in the house—to keep your space safe—one way or another.

In the days of barbarian kinglets it must have been difficult to get a start in the poetry business. If your work wasn't any "good" (as we say these days, hooking our fingers in the air), you might be clubbed to death, tied to a hydrophobic bear, or lit on fire. The original poetical impulse, when you think about it, may have simply been this:

too long. I'm getting very nervous about my writing.

GW: (silence)

SPY: I don't have a writing job. I've been asking around writer friends of mine, and I've been getting scared that really good writing just—that you can't teach it. That's what everyone tells me.

GW: Well, there's talent and there's technique. And talent can't be taught, but technique can be taught and a lot of people need technique in order to unleash their talent. If you've got a strong interest in writing, chances are that you have some talent.

SPY: I hope so.

GW: So you should, you know, go ahead and get yourself (phone rings)

SPY: I have a very strong interest. It's just when I try it just, it comes out, just sort of...flat.

GW: Hmm...and you're a poet?

SPY: I-I guess. I do...poems. And they rhyme.

GW: Um hmm.

SPY: I, yeah, I just, I think maybe my name is wrong.

GW: You're name is wrong?

SPY: My name is Dale, Dale McMannus, and I'm reading in the paper, all the readings in Manhattan, that everyone is like "Bobbito", and Mustafa. Do you think "Dale"...

GW: Your name is fine.

SPY: Should I do Dale McMannus or just Dale?

GW: Um, you know, I think that the name doesn't matter so much, Dale. I mean do you seriously think that your name is a problem?

SPY: Well, y-you—you know—I want to get everything right. I mean, you know, it's the fundamentals. D-do you have a class in names?

GW: No, we do not have a class in names. Listen, I'll tell you what we do have (lists classes). Do you live

One way or another, Homer, you're going to provide entertainment.

It's chilling to imagine how many of yesterday's more "inaccessible" artists may have ended up hanging from fortress gates, wearing signs that read "Boring," or "More Deformed Giants." There was no "safe space," in the old days, for people who wanted to be poets with all their hearts and were not strictly "good." Is it possible that in our own age this defect has been corrected?

ucky 13

Thirteen," or "13," our final stop, is a deafening third-wave cocktail-hipster place south of Union Square, with pink-lit bottles standing in the gloom, streaks of sconce lighting marring the walls, and one of those things that look like a Venusian dandelion trembling with inner light at a corner of the bar. The music consists of funeral-home farfisa set over a crippled samba beat. The only time the music gets turned down is when the poetry starts. Which is the solitary reason to be grateful for most of the poetry, if we weren't already on tenterhooks for it.

Like all the Reading crowds—and it would fill generations of poets with wild surmise—the crowd at 13 is a very dry crowd. No one drinks more than a cat does; if anyone was drunk it'd be off vodka in a bicycle-bottle, and the bartender looks dubiously philosophical. The poets themselves have either tanked up around the corner on wheat-grass spritzers, or have their own tap water in an Evian bottle. Poetry, these days, is all about keeping healthy.

13 is pretty mobbed for this reading, people draped around the bench seating, every one of them readers, as far as we can tell, except for the hijacked friend, or the person who wants to be a reader but hasn't signed up owing to stage-fright or malaise, and is therefore technically though not really a member of the audience. The majordomo is a female wearing cat glasses. She pounces on us with a clip-board. We start to sign it, and then realize that she thinks we are readers. When we announce that we are audience members, she looks at

us as if such a thing has never happened before. Which perhaps, it has not.

Many of the poets are "warming up". A guy who looks like a young, thrice-as-mad William Burroughs is talking to himself in the corner. A jerky, emaciated male poet in a soccer shirt is pacing up and down, barking to himself. The most interesting impending reader is an important-looking guy, with a mad tonsure and giant black-framed glasses. He is wearing a T-shirt printed with the face of Morticia Addams. The trouble—or beauty—is that his paunch is so huge that it stretches and expands Morticia's face until she looks like a closeup of Carnie Wilson being raped by an elephant. He parades—progresses—regally up and down, like a combination cardinal and Rose Bowl float, far too grand and talented to talk to anybody, like an "inaccessible" tenor destined to die for his art under a volley of fruit, benches, and Italian obscenities.

There is a Hindu guy, not wearing a turban, but his hair, curiously, looks like he has just torn a turban from his head, as if he were pull-starting his brain, leaving his hair in a mad, violent, and very impressive poetical corkscrew. He clutches a buckled chapbook and mutters to himself.

"Be respecting," says the MC. You get a lot of words like this among the people who really love poetry these days. Not words like "alarous" or "snotgreen" or anything like that, but words like "featuring," a verb that means: reading, but with your name on the flyer; and now "respecting," which means locally that there is no switching places on the list. "Your number," she says ominously, "is carved in stone." She reads a brief poem of her own. Predictably—I am almost jaded by this point—it is a fantasy about a guy dying, and her keeping his heart in a case until it is dry, and then crumbling it and walking away. It's an awfully good poem. Then the evening disintegrates.

The people's puppet

This particular reading (and, I am told, the entire reading scene), has been discovered by standup comedians. Unable to perform elsewhere, they have begun to appear at literary readings, and the poetry organizers, though obviously disturbed by this phenomenon, are far too inclusive to tell the comedians to go away. The first "performer" at Thirteen is, naturally, not a poet, but an enormously fat mental case who thinks that he is a ventriloquist, and uses a damaged-looking *Sesame Street* "Ernie" puppet to deliver awful jokes and right wing political views.

"I love Clinton," says the guy, into dead, affrighted, silence. "He makes me long for the good old days of Lee Harvey Oswald and Sirhan Sirhan." The performer starts using the puppet to slander lesbians. It is an explosive moment, at the end of a long night's slamming and respecting. The audience doesn't know what on earth to do. The man has done nothing applause-worthy; but at a reading, you can't not applaud.

The first principle of literary readings, after all, is that one must applaud, lest one not in turn, be applauded (and also you don't want to be judgemental especially in circumstances where you're ostensibly required to judge things). The moment you make somebody else feel that pain, the clock starts ticking till the moment that it's your turn. The thing about introducing standards is that you never know when they might blow up in your face.

So, after a pause, we are treated to over-loud and uneasy laughter as prospective performers, with tears in their eyes, put aside their social consciences and glasses of water, and are forced to give a standing ovation to a grossly offensive right-wing ventriloquist.

Yes, our dorks have created a most excellent and admirable cli-

here in New York?

SPY: Yes I do. I do.

I...moved here.

GW: You should, you know, take your time, get into a class, come to a one-day intensive, see if you're interested in taking the ten-week long course.

SPY: D-d-do you have any sort of emergency system or hot line for writers just to call in, like in the middle of the night, if they need to speak...to another writer?

GW: No we don't. We don't offer that service and honestly, I don't know of anybody who does.

SPY: But I mean, it seemed right what you said. You can't write alone. You need a community.

GW: Yeah.

SPY: You don't normally think of writers being together, but I think, I guess it's a good idea.

GW: There's a couple of things we can do. One is you can start meeting regularly with your friends who are writers. A lot of people do something like that where they just meet once a week or once a month.

SPY: I tried. They're all better than me.

GW: Well, what do you mean? They're different from you. I'm sure they write different things than you do. So why do you have to...why would that matter for one thing? You shouldn't be passing that kind of judgment on your writing.

SPY: Well, that's kind of why I wanted to get in touch with you guys.

GW: Yeah.

SPY: Okay, well I guess, I've got your catalogue, I guess I'll look for this thing in November.

GW: If you walk in, come around 11:30. And don't forget payment. And we'll, uh, get you into a class.

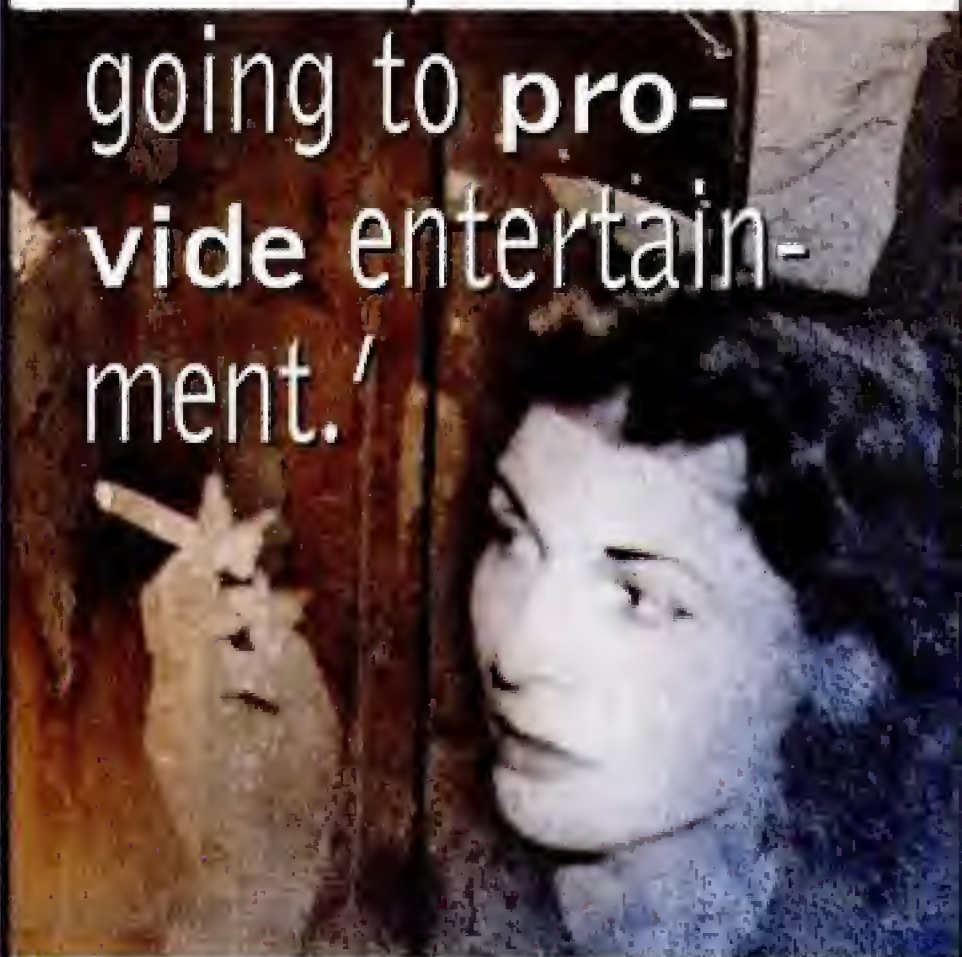
SPY: Thank you so much.

GW: That's fine.

mate, a happy universe, where anyone can rise from his seat, do anything, and hear a clapping sound for his efforts; but perhaps the happy, safe, non-judgemental space we have created for ourselves is turning out (as do so many of those structures that people create for themselves, and which end up getting exploded in the penultimate few paragraphs of articles such as this one) to have a fatal flaw.

The golden rule is all very well and good, but you've got to keep it away from the Art. If you don't, you

'One way or another, Homer, you're going to provide entertainment.'



will (1) applaud in the most obvious and despicable self-service; and (2), you will find yourself wondering—unpleasantly, rather than democratically—which of us is *really* any better than an obese psychopath with an Ernie puppet.

The Artist puts Ernie—his other personality?—back into its bag, and waits at the bar for people to worship him, to recognize his genius, to buy him drinks. No one does. But they should. What he has done is the poet's job: he has told them what they are. Which is dorks.

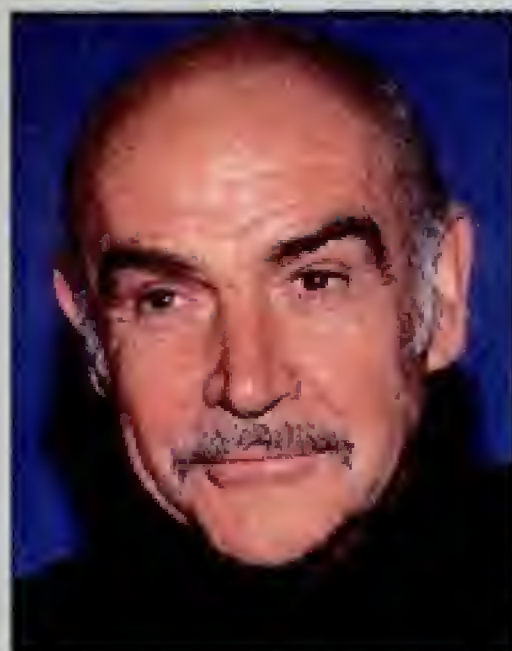
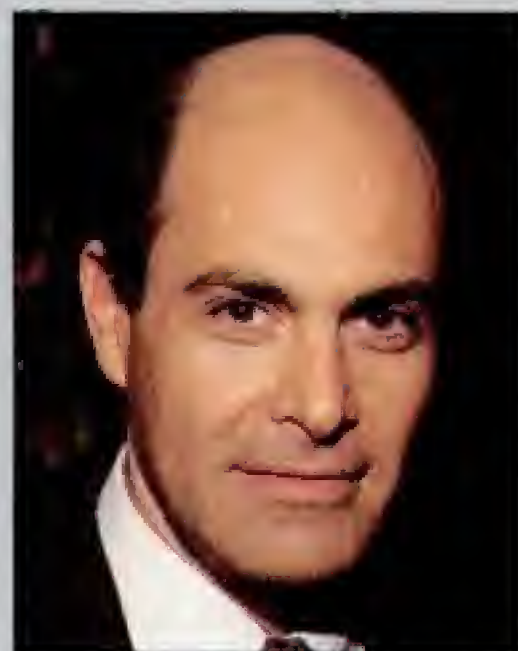
**Names of the non-famous have been surgically altered, for a variety of reasons.*

THE PLAIN

Constants of beauty are famously flexible. Aesthetes in the Baroque era loved fat people. The Victorian era favored women in elaborate hats. Never before, however, has there been an age in which ordinary looking people were designated beautiful *because* they were slightly ugly, or had gone out of their way to be *known* as ugly even though, by anyone's standards, they clearly look fine. Oh look. We've broken the whole thing down for you.

Beautiful-Because-Bald

Throughout History, hair-wigs have traditionally outsold bald-wigs by a massive multiple: evidence perhaps that human beings innately find baldness unappealing. In this unreliable world of ours, though, actors such as **Alan Rachins**, **Anthony Edwards**, and **Sean Connery** can hardly enter a deli without being voted its Sexiest Man. All three men look fine of course, totally inoffensive. But Sexiest Men in the World? What about Tony Danza?



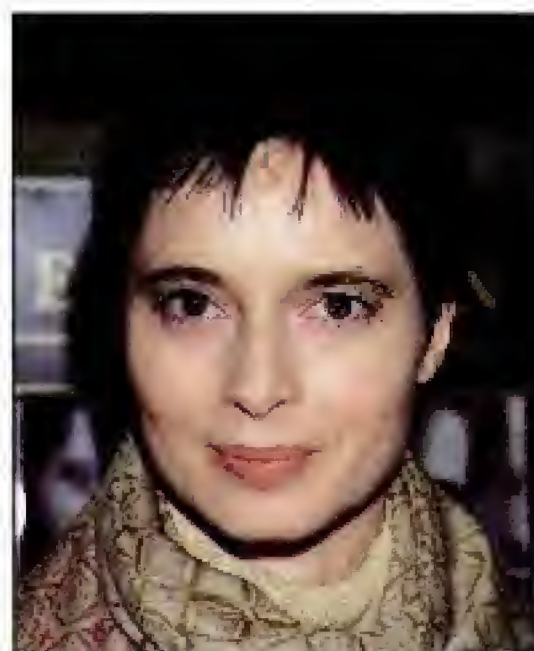
"Girls-Next-Door" Who are Perfectly Attractive

In interviews, both **Sandra Bullock** and **Madonna** frequently dramatize their road to the top as having occurred in spite of "not being the best looking woman in the world." How strange. Both women far exceed the necessary threshold of attractiveness to be considered sex objects by the planet's ravening hordes of sexually fanatical men.



Average-Looking Women Who Get Labeled "The Most Beautiful Woman in the World"

If you simply *aren't* The Most Beautiful Woman in the World, as aren't **Annie Lennox**, **Grace Jones**, **Isabella Rosselini** —and as wasn't the late **Princess Diana**—all is not lost. For unfathomable reasons, the title can still be landed via a.) bizarre displays of masculine behavior; or b.) not actively *contradicting* the public's idea as to what princesses and daughters of Ingrid Bergman are supposed to look like.





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“Increasingly Beautiful”

For aging beauties such as **Katharine Hepburn** and **Elizabeth Taylor**, the onset of plainness can be halted *and even reversed* by grappling regularly with illness. Taylor, particularly, could lose her entire head to disease and still be toasted as “more beautiful than ever” by paper-shuffling TV anchors.

Famously Ugly Men That are Secretly Attractive

For **Frank Zappa**, calling himself “ugly” was just another ham-hock in the soup of his complexity. For the early-career, **Mickey Rourke**’s faux-ugliness lent poignancy to the self-destructive compulsions of the women he was paired with. For **Mick Jagger**, perhaps, it was the need to be seen as rougher and drunker than the mop-topped, cutely bottom-faced Beatles. But can we call a spade a spade for a second? All three men are fucking gorgeous.



Rich Men Who Get Called Ugly Just Because Their Money Gets Them Laid

Ronald Perelman, **Russell Simmons**, **Robin Leach**, and **The Sultan of Brunei**. None of them, with the exception of Leach, is unusually ugly. Nevertheless, all four men have been widely *considered* ugly for the absurd reason that they a) have lots of money and b) are linked to attractive women. It’s not fair. Perelman’s problem is his ex-wife Claudia Cohen, whose in-one’s-face sexuality contrasts suspiciously with Ronald’s personal drabness. Simmons lunches too often with supermodels such as Amber Valetta and Naomi Campbell. The Sultan of Brunei is just too rich. Robin Leach, interestingly, suffers from the opposite syndrome. Everybody assumes he must have lots of money and get lots of sex because he clearly has *some* of both, but he is in fact extremely ugly.



Purposely Plain Supermodels

Ajax-addled housewives sometimes mistake the spread of ordinary-looking supermodels like **Kristen McMenamy**, **Kate Moss**, and **Stella Tennant** for the fashion industry’s finally deciding to make wearable clothes for real people. Wrong. In truth, the fashion industry is a bunch of cocaine-eating deviants who gigglingly opt to send Tennant and Co. down the runway in exactly the same spirit that they occasionally send a warthog or a midget. It’s a joke!



David Caruso

TV’s **David Caruso** is that rarest of beasts. Like most ordinary TV cops, he has a roomful of Sexiest Man trophies. Weirdly though, Caruso has some hair.

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Page 27: Barry Talesnick (Macy); Brylak (Albert); J.L. Macauld (Andreš); Steve Granitz (Lee); Jean Cummings (Rossellini); Paul Smith (Banks); all Retna

Page 34: Todd Warshaw/ AllSport (figure skater); Barry King/ Gamma Liaison (head)

Page 36: Snowdon/ Globe (Diana); Jamey O'Quinn (polish)

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Page 43: Globe (Charles with Spice Girls); T. Horan/ Sygma (Heston)

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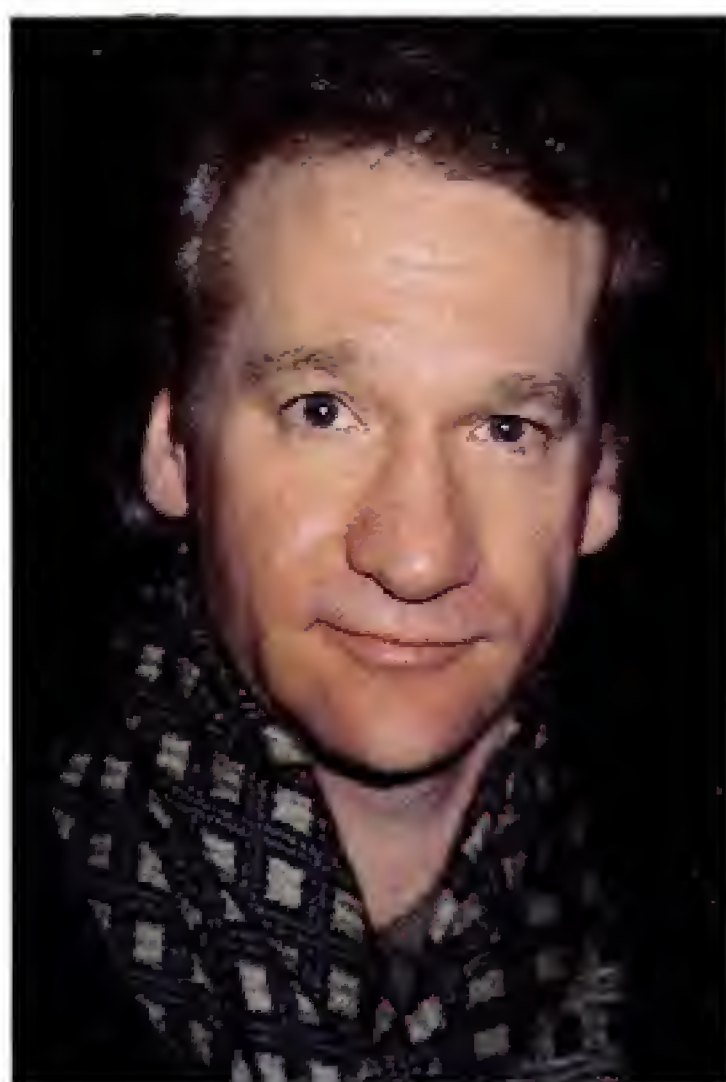
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TRADING BON MOTS WITH BILL MAHER'S ONE-TIME INTERN,

A MAN ON THE BRINK OF POPPING HIS CORK. BY ARI VOUKYDIS



TV'S BILL MAHER

"You have to remember that, financially, I only earn about \$9000 a year, which, after travel, food, and rent costs have been factored in, leaves me with exactly no money at all...Ooh, in five years? I think I'd like a well-respected column in a medium-sized newspaper. Maybe called 'My View,' or 'My World,' or something?"—Maher's former intern.

So you're a former employee of Bill Maher?

I was never paid. I was an intern for Politically Incorrect when it was filmed in New York.

Sweet gig.

Yeah, well it wasn't. The first day, the receptionist was sick so I manned the phones. This was okay with me because the day before I had thrown out my back. I explained this to Bill's personal assistant at lunch, but either she didn't care or she wasn't listening, because the second duty of my first day was to go with her to Bill's old apartment and move his stuff into his new one.

What were the apartments like?

The first was kind of like a big hotel room. The second place was a musty duplex. I wasn't paying particular attention to the architecture. We were carrying out these boxes filled with half-eaten items from his kitchen. A potato, a half-eaten bag of potato chips. And some of his suits and some boxes of books. His assistant was in a constant panic. She put some of his suits on his new bed, then got worried that they'd get wrinkled so she put them in the closet, then panicked that it was too forward of her to go in his closet, so she put them back on the bed. My first day as an intern. I learned how to be an unpaid mover.

Is that when you became disgruntled?

Not really. Even though I wasn't even given a tip for moving his crap, I wasn't pissed because I thought it'd be a good "in" with him, great brownie points. The next day, though, I ran into Bill in the bathroom. We were washing hands at the same time. So I said, "Hey, I helped move your stuff into your new place yesterday. It's a nice place." He just looked at me for a second, dried his hands off, then walked out.

He didn't say anything?

No. That's how he was. Around the third week or so, they had me and the two other girls I was interning with go into his office to meet him. "We want

you guys to meet Bill because we want to have a really friendly working atmosphere here." He's sitting in his office. He doesn't even look up at us until the producer Amy introduces us and then it's "Hi, hi, how are you, how are you," with the wettest fish hand shake of all time. And he says to all of us some corny joke, which I heard him tell the next batch of interns who arrived just before I left.

At least he was making an effort.

He had to do something. They weren't even paying my subway expenses. I worked 3 days a week for a little more than a semester and the only thing I got was one free dinner with a few of the associate producers who couldn't look any more bored if they had to. It was like they were taking all of the little kids to Chuck E. Cheese.

You seem unusually bitter about all this.

I realize that as an intern there is a limited number of things you can actually do. And I realize that you are going to be asked to do a lot of the menial labor. But to move this guy into a new apartment, run to the store for him on a regular basis, and never get so much as a genuine thank you was just ridiculous.

So the experience was utterly worthless to you?

Yup. I tried all semester long to get into a writer's meeting and finally got permission in December to sit in on one. But then Bill felt he had had a bad show, and told the producer to tell me to leave. He didn't want any outsiders sitting in because he felt it would ruin the material. What impact my seated, silent body would have on the material is beyond me.

Are you familiar with the theory that creative people can be deeply affected, even stifled, by the "vibes" that non-creative people throw out even if they don't say anything?

I have never met anyone who gives off fewer vibes than myself.

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